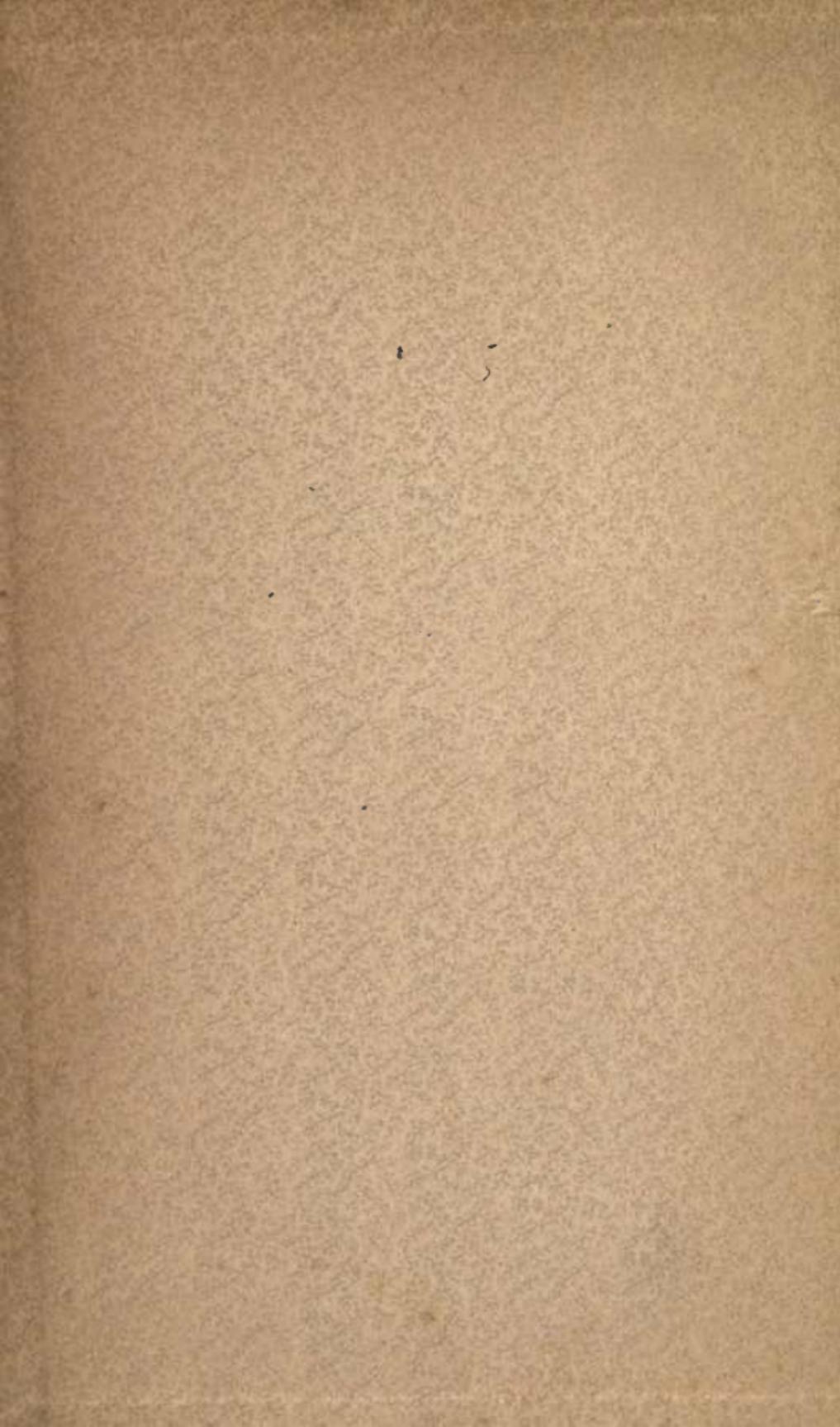


STORM-SWEPT





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OR

SAVED TO SERVE

BY
ESTELLA J. MILLS

BOSTON
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STORM-SWEPT.

CHAPTER I.

ALARM NUMBER SIXTY-THREE.

“Hearts that are breaking and eyes that weep,
Sorrow and ruin and death are there.”

“ EGINALD! Reginald Dean! Are you making your will?” and Mrs. Dean tapped with her slippers foot impatiently on the lower step of the broad oaken staircase.

A glance within those heavy paneled doors would have revealed to you a home of elegance and refinement, well-fitting its location in aristocratic Martin Square. It was, too, a home of comfort wherein every article, either useful or ornamental, gave evidence that the mistress of that domain was an adept in the art of arrangement. The folds of the curtains hung with an air of grace, each article of furniture and of bric-à-brac stood at precisely the correct angle, thus

affording the most pleasing effect; while, throughout, the coloring harmonized most delightfully. The graceful womanly figure poised on the lower stair, though in an attitude of impatience, was in full harmony with the surroundings as she stood there under the soft light from the chandeliers, while scintilating diamonds nestled in her raven black hair.

“Reginald!” again the musical voice rose with a trace of impatience.

“Coming, Ethel! coming!”

“Do hurry! You men are forever telling about women being so slow in arranging their toilets, and here I’ve been ready and waiting fully five minutes. I fear now we shall miss the first selections, and I would not lose a note for anything.”

“Time enough, time enough; I just stopped to kiss the children good-night, and, by the way, Ethel, you have done a very careless thing. I saw your amethyst set on the dressing-case; and there, too, lay your jewel-casket open. I’m afraid some day your valuables will be missing.”

“Well, there surely is not time now for me to go back; and Katie is perfectly honest. I’ve done the same thing dozens of times before.”

"But, Ethel, I think it is too much for you to tempt her so."

"Now, Rex, for pity's sake don't begin to lecture me, or I shall be sorry I am going; but no, Patti will be there and she is divine."

It was a frosty winter night, and the stars were brightly shining points of light against the inky blackness of ethereal space, but safely sheltered from the cold and chilling air, Reginald Dean and wife, in their own carriage, were driven to the door of the opera house. They sat in their private box listening to entrancing strains elicited from several score of instruments. After a time there came a grand crash of music, a few dulcet strains, and all was still; then, like a radiant vision, there glided into the presence of that vast assembly, the marvelous, soul-stirring Patti. Bending low before that sea of upturned faces she was greeted with a veritable thunder of applause; but it ceased as suddenly, and that rich melodious voice rose and fell in sweetest cadences, tenderly, soulfully, even sadly lingering over the heart-melting notes, of "Home Sweet Home." The last echoes were dying away and the bird-voiced singer retired from view while every one in that large assembly seemed spell-bound. But as she

disappeared the charm was broken, and round after round of deafening applause rang and reverberated from pit to dome. The concert progressed, and one after another came song of flute or violin, or mellow voices of lesser lights, until silence again reigned. But as the prima-donna once again approached the foot-lights, another sound than that of music or applause broke the perfect stillness that prevailed.

It was the clash and clang of fire-bells wildly echoing through space, where but a moment ago had sounded the thunder of applause. With blanching cheeks each one held his breath, mentally counting the strokes lest they should tell of harm to himself or his loved ones.

One—two—three—four—five—six; a slight pause, one—two—three; sixty-three. A few people left their seats and hurriedly passed out of the building. No one noticed the startled look, nor heard the moan of terror, as the little amber-robed woman grasped the arm of her husband saying in a hoarse whisper:

“The children—oh, Reginald, it is our box, sixty-three. What if it is our house?”

With quickened steps and voices stilled with fear they reached their carriage and were rapidly

driven homeward; alas, home no longer. There met their gaze a sight to turn their brains, or send the quivering life-blood back upon their hearts in the chill grasp of death. The mansion which not two hours before had been left in apparent security, was now a blazing, blackening mass, the fiery sheets of flame fiendishly leaping from every window and reaching their lurid arms up into the dense mass of smoke that hung like a black pall over the ruins of what once was home; and where their two little ones had been left innocently sleeping. The father could even then feel the soft warmth of the baby lips as he had pressed them to his own with a fond "Good-night, and God bless you;" and now, "Gracious Heaven, save my children"; were the words wrung from his whitening lips. Already the frantic mother was dashing up the granite steps only to be grasped and held firmly in the embrace of a stalwart fireman.

Struggling, she cried, "Let me go! I must save my children! Oh, are you heartless? Have you no mercy?" And then, with a shriek and a moan, the stricken mother fell back upon the snow, crimsoned by the flash of the flames. Mr. Dean had tried to gain an entrance, but the

stairs were burned away. A yawning, seething abyss of smoke and flame greeted his terror-stricken gaze as he stood in the doorway of his once beautiful house.

Not one step over the sill could he take. The floors were gone, and must have burned like tinder. Driven back by the dense clouds of suffocating smoke, he returned to the side of his wife, who, like a wounded bird, now lay cold, shivering and insensible. From one to another the father despairingly turned, questioning, "Were the children saved?" He cared for naught else; but no one could tell. They knew not how the fire had started, neither had they any knowledge of the fate of the inmates. No one had been seen to leave the house, and combustion was so rapid that the firemen were unable to enter the building now entirely gutted, only the four blazing, blackened, windowless walls left standing out against that star-bespangled sky.

Hoping against hope, Mr. Dean gathered in his arms the insensible form of his wife, and sprang into the carriage with the words "Myrtle Avenue" huskily whispered to the driver, and in a few moments was at his mother's door. Tenderly lifting the still form of his wife,

he carried her up the steps and into the hallway.

“The children?” he questioned, as his mother came to meet him. “What of them?” she asked, and then hope was gone. Leaving his wife in his mother’s care he returned to the scene of the fire. Moments lengthened into hours, still the anxious watcher could find no clue to the missing. After a time the crowd dispersed, engines and firemen were gone, and Reginald Dean stood alone gazing at the smoking, smouldering ruin. Overhead the stars sparkled as of yore. The evening before he had stood by the window with Angie in his arms, as she had asked him to hold her up so she could see that big star over there. Then it was almost hidden by the church tower from whose belfry now rang out the hour well past midnight.

It would have made your heart ache to have witnessed that stalwart form bowed in grief, not knowing whither to turn, or of whom to ask what had become of his little ones. He could not believe but that in some way they had been saved from so dreadful a fate. They were young and innocent,—his Angie, scarce three, and baby Evelyn, just able to walk alone; and a merciful God would not visit such evil on his darlings.

If some one would or could only say they were somewhere safe, but this fearful suspense, bridged by no ray of hope,—it was fearful, maddening. He must go back to Myrtle Avenue, to the home of his mother, and await the morrow's dawn.

Still dazed by his awful grief, he entered the room where his wife lay sleeping. He seemed to forget that she might be ill,—his mind centered on the two little ones and the only words half-sobbed, half-moaned, were "Angie—Evelyn." A physician had been summoned ; and Mrs. Dean, brought out of that death-like faint, raved so like a mad creature, it was necessary to administer an opiate. The doctor prepared a powder for Mr. Dean ; but he, with an impatient gesture, pushed it aside, and taking a seat by his wife's bedside dropped his head upon his hands and did not move for hours. The great fire burned low, but he did not heed it. Mrs. Van Alstyne, his mother, was in close attendance and kept anxious watch over the two silent ones. As the first clear streaks of dawn crept into the room where the watcher sat, he arose, and with weary steps descended to the floor below. He was met in the hall by his mother bearing in her hands a tray

on which was daintily arrayed a slice of buttered toast, and a cup of steaming coffee.

"Come back, Reginald, and get this warm drink. It won't take but a moment."

He lifted the cup and drained it, and in another instant was gone. She gazed after him wonderingly;—then there flashed upon her mind the reason for his strange and altered appearance. Ah, yes, it was her dark-haired boy, changed in a single night to a hoary-headed, broken-hearted man. Every endeavor was made to find some trace of the children, but not one in that vast city could be found who knew aught in regard to them. The busy world moved on; the fire was chronicled; but, ere the sun had twice risen and set, the incident was a thing of the past, forgotten in the ceaseless bewildering whirl of the great metropolis. Those hearts that had loved and lost were aching voids; while only immediate friends remembered why Reginald Dean's hair had so suddenly become blanched; and the few who missed his wife from social circles, occasionally remarked, "It was sad about her losing her children. She is an invalid now."

Ever and anon there sprang up a hope tugging at the father's heart-strings, and breathing sug-

gestions that, in some way, he should find his children again on earth ; and with this he tried to quiet his troubled soul. But, Reginald Dean, another sorrow awaits you. Listen for the echoing notes of that beautiful hymn, "Home, sweet Home." It seems strangely connected with the most sad occurrences of your life, and it shall come to pass that when you hear those pathetic strains, you will shudderingly question, "What calamity now hastens on ?"

CHAPTER II.

LED BY A DREAM.

“ In the white curtain to and fro,
She saw the gusty shadows sway.”



OR a week Mrs. Dean lay in a comatose condition, once in a while rallying and speaking a few wandering words, then sinking again into the same sad state of lethargic insensibility. A second, and a third week passed, and she appeared to be gaining, but though bodily strength was returning the mind seemed weak. Outside her chamber window stood a row of gaunt oak trees, whose dry leaves rustled softly as the chill breeze moaned through the swaying branches. The window had been left slightly opened, and the white curtain idly swung to and fro with the breeze.

One day, about two months from the opening of our story, Mrs. Van Alstyne stood bathing the hot forehead, when Mrs. Dean suddenly started

up to a sitting position. Pointing to the open window, she said, "Mother, do you see that white hand coming in at the side of the curtain? Angie beckons for me to come. Don't you think I had better go?" With trembling voice Mrs. Van Alstyne tried to quiet the disordered brain, telling her to wait till she felt better, and then they would talk about it. In a few moments Mrs. Dean shrieked out with fearful emphasis, "The fire bells! Our box! sixty-three! the children! Oh, Reginald!" and crept under the clothes, covering her head, as if to keep out the sound.

Then, indeed, did the cup of Mrs. Van Alstyne's grief overflow. Bereft of the grandchildren, now to feel their mother was a maniac—yes, the worst had come, the mind was gone. Reginald Dean moved about the house like a man bereft of feeling, speaking in subdued tones whenever he spoke at all, brightening up occasionally when the door-bell rang, then, when no tidings came, settling into a deeper state of melancholia. But weeks and months passed, and all hope departed.

As Easter approached there came a Sunday like a fair May day in advance of its fellows. A

few bluebirds and robins were out, and on the trees the buds were bursting, patches of snow lay along by the fences, while here and there the grass was starting into greenness. The mellow sun stole up over the tree-tops and into the clear blue of the sky overhead. Church bells rang their solemn chimes as Mrs. Van Alstyne and Reginald Dean bent their steps toward the old stone church of St. Paul ; ivy-grown and moss-encrusted. Within, the semi-darkness was broken by flecks of sunlight falling through stained glass windows, and reaching down through the vaulted space overhead into dim recesses within the high-backed pews, fit resting-place for those bowed down with sorrow or with care. It placed one in a worshipful mood to sit there screened from the gaze of a large congregation, listening to the sweet chanting of the choir, and the solemn roll of the organ. The player's fingers swept over the keys in a softly echoing prelude, then in another moment on the balmy spring air there swelled forth the notes of "Home, Sweet Home." How tenderly and solemnly the choir sang the hymn through, while up to the throne of grace rose the prayer of one, as the words filled the dim old church,—

“ While here in this valley of conflict I stay,
 O give me submission and strength as my day;
In all my afflictions to Thee would I come,
 Rejoicing in hope of my glorious home.”

A shudder ran through Mr. Dean’s frame as his mind reverted to the last time he had heard that sweet refrain. Neither from the hymn, nor from the sermon that followed, could he gain either comfort or consolation. Once, not quite half a score of years ago, his heart would have responded in full sympathy with the service, and would have been touched, perhaps, with the balm of healing; but the years had brought business cares and perplexities, and in looking after the affairs of the world he had lost sight of the narrow way, and was now threading the intricate mazes of a worldly business life.

Faith is a slender thread on which hangs one’s destiny. Clung to, and strengthened, it brings about, from possibilities, genuine realities, but when the faith-cord loosens and well-nigh breaks, we lose things out of our present lives that we might have had for the asking. If not too long neglected, we may bring these realities into our lives; but alas! too often, when we look back and think what might have been, how near to our

grasp have been some of the things our hearts have most desired, we lose sight of the remnant of faith that is left, and go groping on in the darkness. At the house on Myrtle Avenue, a quiet Sabbath stillness reigned. Aunt Eunice glided in and out performing her household tasks, while Mrs. Dean, robed in a soft garment of white, reclined on a couch. The warm spring breeze entering the open window lifted the raven locks from the pale brow, as if it would pity and caress that saddest of all living creatures—a mind-wrecked human being.

A white-capped, uniformed nurse was in close attendance, and stepping to the side of Mrs. Dean arranged about her form a fleecy afghan, then bent over her pallid features in order to become perfectly assured that the patient was sleeping. There was not even a quiver of the eyelids, and one white hand resting upon her breast rose and fell with the regular breathing.

“She is fast asleep, surely,” thought the nurse. “I will run out for a little airing.”

Only a few feet from the sitting-room windows, and opening out from another part of the house, was a square veranda, on which stood a comfortable old-fashioned chair, and in this the nurse

settled herself for a brief season of rest. After waiting until the balmy atmosphere was fast inviting slumber to the weary body of the nurse, Mrs. Dean raised herself upon one elbow, and glanced around the apartment. Becoming convinced that she was alone, she laughed softly to herself, remarking, "Not asleep that time, were you, Ethel? Now or never!" Then arising, she passed into Mrs. Van Alstyne's room, stepped to the bedside, slid her hand in under the mattress, and with the chuckling remark, "I thought I should find it here," drew forth a revolver. Then quickly returning to her position on the couch she critically surveyed the weapon. Whatever thoughts were whirling through her mind were brought to a sudden close; for just then the front door creaked as the church-goers re-entered the house. At the same instant there was a click of the pistol, a sharp report, and Reginald Dean and Mrs. Van Alstyne rushed into the room in time to see the instrument drop from the hand of the poor demented woman. Ethel Dean had attempted to take her own life.

Reginald's cup of sorrow was overflowing, but the startled aim had erred and the wound was not fatal. Careful nursing for weeks was necessary,

and what a strain came upon the minds of the watchers none outside could ever know. A violent fever raged week after week, until the poor racked form was reduced almost to a skeleton. The doctor had a hope which he did not whisper. If he only could bring that hope to pass, what joy, what joy !

Down to the very gates of death passed that frail mind-diseased woman, until there came an hour when it seemed as though the death-angel must claim the victory. Then came a calm and almost breathless sleep, when it appeared that the sleeper might pass away without a struggle. All watched and waited. Man had done to the extent of his skill. It was in the Lord's hands, and He is merciful. The hours passed on and then—oh, hope beyond belief, those eyes opened, and the glitter of fever and of insanity was gone. Breathlessly they sat and waited. Was it one conscious moment before the soul should leave its temple of clay and soar away clothed in immortality? The first words spoken by the physician, "I give you hope," were like rain in the desert.

Then followed days of anxious care, days when no one spoke above a whisper; when all walked

on tip-toe: and every sound and movement in the sick-room was telegraphed all over the house. The children were never mentioned, for the effect of such an allusion was dreaded. Mrs. Dean was a poor frail invalid, hardly worth raising, as she expressed it; but what joy pervaded that household. Mr. Dean had grown five years younger in his appearance, and through this great mercy he had been led back to the foot of the Cross. He recognized these trials of the past few months as being the Refiner's fire. Though underneath all was the wound caused by the loss of the children, yet he began to lay that trial, along with his other burdens, upon the great Burden-Bearer.

Then came a time when business life must be taken up again; and with how much better heart this man could go out to his work feeling that he left one at home who would gladly await his coming; one who was clothed and in her right mind. Domiciled in the house on Myrtle Avenue, was Eunice Stiles, a plain everyday New England woman, unlearned in book-lore, but well-versed in the knowledge most needful: having ever about her the Everlasting Arms, which sustained her in every trial, and made her a wonderful help and

consolation to all those with whom she had any dealings. When Reginald Dean was a baby she had left her country home in order to fulfill a school-girl's promise.

Reginald's mother and Eunice Stiles were mates at school; and at the close of those halcyon days a mutual promise had been made that whenever one needed the other it should be her first duty to minister to the wants of her chosen friend. Therefore it came to pass that Eunice Stiles was sent for and came with very little delay, and in the train of circumstances which followed, it had come about that Mrs. Alstyne's home had for years been the home of Aunt Eunice. It was she who had cradled in her arms the baby Rex,—little king of the house, too, had he been, then when older grown,—far beyond the desire for softly-crooned lullabys,—she had bound up his stubbed toes and extracted slivers for him; and even doctored and nursed with the aid of raw oysters an eye injured by a sissing fire-cracker. It was she who had dressed the wounded head when one time, when jumping from the hay-mow, Reginald struck against a spike in a beam and inflicted an ugly wound. Ofttimes she made a little "try cake," or pie, or pudding, purposely for him;

and how many many childish faults did she smooth over, screening him always if possible.

And now she was revolving in her mind the question as to what she could do to help him out of this terrible trouble that he was struggling so hard to bear. Little Angie used often to visit grandmamma; and Aunt Eunice was just beginning to teach the child to sew. The kitchen at grandma's was Eunice Stiles' sitting-room by preference. It contained two south windows opening out over a very pleasant landscape, and these windows she counted as among her mercies. One end of the room was fitted up with a cosy corner where her carefully tended house-plants thrived and blossomed beneath the rays of the warm south sunlight. Upon the wall was a small door which, when opened, revealed a store of treasures. For one thing there was a box of picture-books, old-fashioned and quaint in design and print; but for hours Angie would amuse herself with them. There too was a miniature set of furniture and a unique representation of a quilting bee, wooden dolls, patchwork quilt and all, and these with many other quaint toys Angie was in the habit of playing with when she came, bringing life and sunshine into that quiet house.

In Aunt Eunice's work-basket lay two little squares of calico on which Angie had placed straggling stitches. They seemed almost sacred now, for there they were just as the baby fingers had left them, when last the little one was at grandma's. Aunt Eunice had a way of talking to herself, and one day, as she sat there by the south window, looking first at the bit of sewing and then with tear-dimmed eyes gazing out over the landscape, catching glimpses of birds flitting to and fro as they wrought at the building of their nests; and noting the starting grass and foliage on the distant hillsides; she began knitting more vigorously as she communed with herself.

"I feel, somehow, as though those children were in the land o' the livin'. I know I should feel different than I do if they were dead and gone. I had a dream last night, the curiosest one I ever had I believe; and I thought those children were in an orphan asylum, and in the very asylum that was in the city near where I was brought up. I'm a leetle bit superstitious about dreams, and I think I'll go there and see if there is anything to it." Just then Mrs. Van Alstyne entered the room.

"Martha,"—Aunt Eunice always called her by

her first name, for, as she said, "Wasn't they born and brought up neighbors?"—"I want to go away for a few days to see my sister Hester over to Fairbury. I hain't been in a long time, and I've got a sort of a hankerin' after her to-day."

"Why, go by all means, if you would like to. You will be back by house-cleaning time?"

"Certainly, I only want to go and stay over Sunday, and perhaps a day or two longer."

When Friday morning came, Aunt Eunice started on her journey, not a long one, to be sure, but she seldom traveled, and a trip of a few hours' duration seemed quite an episode in her quiet life. It was near noon when the train she was to take steamed into the depot where she had sat waiting for two mortal hours; and when at last she stood on the New Haven platform, she looked about her, half wondering if any way Hester had surmised she was coming, and sent Jared to the city to meet her. But, no, every face was a strange one, and yet the place had not changed greatly. Here and there was a modern-built house, and scarcely a moment passed when she could not hear the tinkle of a horse-car bell. In the distance, looming up between her and the face of West Rock rose the tall spire of the Methodist,

Church. Away off to the northward along the horizon lay the Sleeping Giant, and Mount Carmel at its head. The sun had passed the zenith and was moving down towards the tops of the trees that fringed a ridge of hills around to the westward as Aunt Eunice hurried along on her self-imposed mission. She boarded a car, and alighted at the point nearest her destination; then walked thoughtfully along the elm-shaded street to where the old Asylum stood. She almost thought she had mistaken the place. Wings had been added, and the shrubbery had grown so tall, and multiplied greatly, while over the doorway were the words, *Faith Orphan Asylum*.

"Hem," said Aunt Eunice, "this is a new wrinkle; must have changed hands since I was here last." However she rang the bell, and a young girl, tidily clad, answered the summons.

"Good afternoon, miss, have you any little children here?"

"Yes, ma'am, quite a number."

"Can I see them?"

"Certainly! Would you wish to see the nursery children or the older ones first? The little ones are having supper. The others are

scattered about the building and playground, as this is their hour for recreation."

"Please let me see the nursery children;" and Aunt Eunice's voice trembled with emotion.

"Wait a moment, please," and the girl stepped into a room leading off from the wide hall. In an instant she returned with the matron, who questioned, "Are you looking for a child for adoption, madam?"

The snap of those black eyes and the firm closing of the thin lips which seemed to say, "My word is law," made Aunt Eunice shiver, but she answered calmly, "No, a friend of mine has lost two children recently, and I thought I'd like to see if there were any here who resembled them."

"Their ages, please?"

"One and three!"

"Very well. Alice, show this lady to the nursery."

The nursery door opened, revealing twenty or more little tots gathered around a long, low table, quietly eating their supper of bread and milk. One chubby little curly-head was nodding low over her small yellow bowl, when from the further end of the room rose the voice of the nursery matron. "Emma Bell, wake up and

finish your supper for you will have to go to bed with the rest when they are done." The nodding head was quickly raised, and the black eyes of the child cast a defiant glance at the woman. Aunt Eunice's heart swelled with pity toward the poor little waif, and a new-born wish entered her mind that she might be able some day to make a home for herself, and take some lonely little soul to share it with her and cheer her latest years. She intently surveyed the little faces, then turned to the girl and said, "There ain't none here like 'em. That one"—pointing to Emma, "is most like Evelyn. I'm so sorry; and these are all?"

"Yes, these are all." And Aunt Eunice sadly turned away, for hope had risen high, and visions of rejoicing had flitted before her mind, but there was nothing in the dream after all. She had been foolish to give it a second thought. She might have known dreams always go by contraries. She would not let a soul know how foolish she had been. So she retraced her steps and took the omnibus for Fairbury, where sister Hester lived.

"She was 'dretful glad' to see me;" so Aunt Eunice told Mrs. Van Alstyne upon her return;

"and so was her husband, Jared Cooper. I hadn't seen him in as much as ten years; and he's got to be postmaster over to the Junction. They live in the same house the post-office is in," she added. "He's postmaster for Fairbury and Westbridge too. That's the next village, you know."

Time passed, and life at the cottage went on in the old routine, as nearly as it could; though everywhere there seemed to be a something missing. There were places where they felt there must be a tangible object; but when, involuntarily, a hand was put out, only empty space was revealed. But you who have loved ones gone over the boundary from whence none ever return, you can define in your hearts the void, the absolute chaos, which for a time prevailed.

CHAPTER III.

A DEED OF DARKNESS.

“Child, thy bed shall be
Folded safe from harm—Love, deep and kind,
Shall watch around.”



NE bright April morning, when the world was waking to the echo of song-birds, and the balmy, resinous odors of balsam and fir pervaded the air; when violets and anemones lifted their heads in the woodland, having heard the early call of the spring-showers; in the doorway of a pleasant cottage, in a town on the outskirts of a large city, a shrewd-faced woman stood, her hand raised to her eyes, as she looked anxiously up and down the road, apparently watching for some one. Presently a young man came in sight, and the woman hastened down the road to meet him, impatient to learn some tidings for which she had evidently waited anxiously and long. No houses were near, though a few columns of

ascending smoke defined the location of several distant cottages hidden by trees and undulations of the intervening meadowland. The cottage in the foreground was an old-fashioned structure, somewhat elevated above the roadway along which the couple now approached in earnest conversation.

“Hang it,” the young man was saying, “it was a tender sort of a job, and I’ll be blowed if I ever want another such; but, however, it’s done. Now for my pay.”

“Tell me about it first,” said the woman.

“Well, to start with, we took a good two hours’ train-ride. I bought some lunch for ‘em—candy and things—had to carry the little one all the way to the train. Her little legs couldn’t walk fast enough, of course. Guess I had one pretty close shave, though. We were going through some country town and slacked up long enough to take a mail-bag aboard, and I’ll be hanged if the biggest ‘un didn’t spy, or think she did, somebody she knew. ‘Oh,’ said she, ‘we get off here, I know. There’s Aunt Eunice. I guess she’s comin’ to take us home;’ but the window was down and the train was off in a jiffy, and I just caught a glimpse of an old-fashioned

neat-looking woman ; I orter not say it, I s'pose, but mother, I'd a heap ruther stand in her shoes than yourn at the judgment."

"Hush, Matt, I did it for the best. We never could have kept 'em, and taken proper care of 'em ; and then they was born to the purple anyway, and may yet be given away to some rich people, and it'll be a godsend to 'em that they went there."

"Ah, yes ; that's all very well, but May bees don't fly in April."

"Quick, and tell me the rest. Katie will be trying to get up before I get back, and I've had my hands full keeping her on that bed all this time, I tell you. It seems as if your ship never would get in. It'll be some weeks yet before she'll fully recover from the effects of all those powders ; and we must get away somewhere soon in order to live, for there's no work around here."

"Ha, ha,—I'll warrant you don't find your purse empty for one while, even after you've settled with me ; but here goes for the rest of the story. I couldn't pacify the biggest un no way, after she spied that old woman, not till the train-boy came through and I filled her lap with oranges and candy. That kept her busy a little

while, and she quieted down considerable when I told her I guessed the old lady would be at the station when we got off. Of course she wasn't ; so I suggested that we go and find her. I wasn't long in comin' in sight of the asylum. There's a big church across the way from it, and I took 'em through the cemetery that's next to it, cut acrossst the potter's field, and came out on the other side. Then we went in at the big gate to the asylum. I slunk round behind the shrubbery, and told 'em to go up to the door and knock, and, when somebody opened it, to tell 'em they'd come for their auntie, and if she wasn't there to go in and wait. Then I skipped, I couldn't bear to stay there and see 'em boo-hooin' any more.

" If I had, I guess I'd a brought 'em back here, sure. Now, whatever becomes of 'em I don't know ; only the last I see of 'em they was a-climbin' those front steps, and a-chawin' on some candy, and the little un had an orange under her arm bigger'n her own head.

" She was a lovin' leetle creeter. How she did put her little arms around my neck when I carried her. It's your sin, mother, if any harm comes to 'em ; for I'll be blowed if I wasn't a-mind to bring 'em back a dozen times. If I hadn't a-been hard

up for the cash I would, sure. That's what I'm here for now, so plank it down."

"Well, it's a good job you didn't bring them back, after I'd got as far as this. Here's twenty-five dollars, and now don't let me see you again for a year, not till I get Katie over it. I expect she'll have a fit. What are you goin' to do? You can't stay around here long, or she'll know there's been somethin' in the wind."

"I expect to ship in the first sailing vessel I can find for a tour around the world. You'd better make it twenty-five more. I'll be gone three years, probably, and I vow that job was cheap enough at fifty."

"Here, take it, if you hain't earned it. Now clear out, and don't show your face again for three years."

"Ha, you're a pretty mother, you are, to send your only son off for three years with strict orders not to show his face in less time. Well, give my love to Katie, and tell her I'll bring her a new gown, if I don't land in Davy Jones's locker."

They had stood down by the roadside till the conversation was ended. Then the young man started down the road, whistling as he went, and

the woman entered the house. Matt was jubilant over two things. He had fifty dollars in cold cash to do with as he wished ; and he had played a little game on his mother.

“ She’s going to lie to Katie, I know she is,— why shouldn’t I lie to her,” he logically reasoned. “ I don’t suppose it makes a ’tarnal bit of difference to her whether I took those children four or forty miles away. It would be a good joke if they should happen to get where Katie could see ‘em. Whew ! wouldn’t she make Rome howl ? Gee Whittaker ! I can a’most see her eyes a-snap-
pin’ now. ‘ Right is right,’ Katie says, and I’ll be blowed if I don’t believe so, too. It’s a shame to put away those cunnin’ little creeters. Matt Sharon, stop your blubberin’. Never knowed afore you was quite a fool. Well, I ain’t obliged to go in a sailin’ vessel for a trip around the world,” and he said it again to himself not three hours later, as he stood on Long Wharf in the office of Captain Perkins, and signed his name on the books of a taut little schooner hauling coal from Norfolk.

What he wrote read as follows :—

“ Matthew Sharon, seaman, New Haven.” He did not live in that city, in fact, never had ; but

perhaps some little bird had told him that before he would return from his voyage his mother and Katie would be residents of the City of Elms.

Mrs. Sharon entered the cottage, and passed through the living-room into the kitchen beyond; but as her feet touched the door-sill she stood as one petrified. A slight form was visible in the doorway between the sitting-room and the bed-chamber adjoining. It was a thin face, frightfully scarred, that the woman beheld.

“Katie Sharon, are you possessed? Go right back to bed this minute. You ain’t no more fit to be walkin’ around than nothin’ at all.”

The wasted hand wandered over the red seams in her forehead, as the girl apparently tried to recall something. Then, bending forward, she glanced around the room and said, “Where are the children, mother?” Mrs. Sharon was prepared to answer what she fully expected would be Katie’s first question. “Oh, their father came and took them a few days after the fire. He took the jewelry and money, too, but gave me one hundred dollars to use for you; and said he was very grateful to you for saving the children and valuables. He was very sorry you were so badly burned, and wanted to send a doctor and

nurse, but I thanked him and told him I thought I could get along all right.

He called you a heroine, and said some day, when you were better, he would come and see you. I don't suppose he will though. He said that, as their home was destroyed, and he had urgent business in Europe, they would all take a voyage together, for he did not like to leave his wife and children behind him, especially after they had come so near to a final separation.

Katie was pleased to hear that Mr. Dean had taken the children and glad too that he had commended her for her bravery, but she was sorry to learn they had gone to Europe. How she would have liked to have seen those dear little creatures, tenfold more dear to her now, knowing she had been the means of saving them from a dreadful death.

“But, mother, will he know where to find me?” she asked after a few moments’ reflection.

“Oh, yes, he selected this house for us, he thought you would get well faster out here in the country,” and again Katie thought how very kind Mr. Dean was.

The days wore on and strength returned, in a measure, to Katie, who would sit for hours in a

comfortable arm-chair, her feet resting on a wadded foot-stool which her mother had thoughtfully provided for her. One thing troubled Katie, though she hardly dared voice the thought; but as time passed she came to realize that, although her general health was returning, her feet were almost useless, and she must hereafter be a cripple. To one who had been as active as Katie, it was a dreadful cross to bear; but she bore it like a true woman. Her mother noticed with what difficulty she moved about from one place to another, and observed that she almost continually sat in the cretonne-covered chair, with her feet resting on the wadded top of the box-like foot-stool. The medicine had done its work, in one way, and Mrs. Sharon was pleased with the effect produced as far as keeping Katie stupefied till after the children were disposed of was concerned; but whether to be glad or sorry that she was injured for life was another question.

The ship with Matt on board had been two weeks behind time; but Mrs. Sharon had begun her scheme, and she said to herself she might as well keep it up and accomplish her purpose—one might as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb—

but she had not counted on any lasting effect from the drugs. But Matt came, and the children went, and Matt went again ; and now it was the first of May and high time to be getting to work somewhere. Katie greatly enjoyed their sojourn in the country during those early spring days. She could see such pleasant sights from her window. Unused to country landscapes, every day's unfolding was a new pleasure to her. She felt that her mother had been very kind to leave the busy city life and come with her out into the great wide open country, where she could fast regain strength and health ; and now, to have lost the use of her feet, it worried her greatly, for fear she was be a lifelong burden to her.

One afternoon she sat gazing out over the line of hills then enveloped in a misty haze, the soft, warm, sweet-scented breeze sending a pleasant sensation to the very tips of her fingers. Beyond the hills lay the city in which she had previously resided. How she longed to see the children, and hear their merry prattle, and with the wish was born a resolution that, some day, when she was able, she would go and search out grandma Van Alstyne, and perhaps by that time Mr. Dean's family would be back from Europe.

Then came the thought of her poor crippled feet, but she resolved that, in some way, she would carry her new-born resolution into effect.

How frequently we promise ourselves that some act shall be performed, but procrastination creeps in and time speeds on! A word we would have spoken is left unsaid; a deed we would have performed is left undone; a resolve we have made is not carried out; and stern fate, interposing, bars the doors we once could have opened, and the paths in the labyrinth are as intricate as ever; the meshes of the net are as tangled as before. Mrs. Sharon had been to the post-office for their weekly paper. She thought best to keep posted about outside things, for there might be something of interest to her, which it would not be well to miss. She dropped off her bonnet and shawl and sat down to rest awhile, and Katie looked over the "wants" column. That was her first thought now that she was better, but what earthly thing could a girl do but sew who could not walk? She had heretofore done second work, and taken care of children; but as for sewing, that seemed out of the question.

"Just in luck, mother, I guess this is the place

for us ;" and she read : " Wanted, a first-class laundress and assistant. Call on Mrs. Catlin, Principal, Young Ladies' Seminary, No. — West Chapel St., New Haven."

" That's just the place, Katie, though I don't know what you can do, only clear-starching."

" Never you mind, mother, Katie has the use of her hands yet. I shall have a board made to order, and I can sit and iron collars and cuffs and small pieces ; and I'm sure I can help rinse and wring clothes too. So if we can only get it we shall do nicely. Do go right away and see about it, mother, before any one gets ahead of you."

Mrs. Sharon did go early and was fortunate enough to secure the situation. Katie was jubilant. Perhaps now she would have a chance to pick up a little learning ; if she only could. Reluctantly she would bid good-bye to the home-like cottage where they had lived but a few months ; but her hopes were buoyed up by the prospect of a chance to earn something, thereby lessening her mother's burden. She did not know that it was that mother's own hand which had brought on their misfortune, she did not know that at that moment Mr. Dean was bowed down with inconsolable grief over the loss of his

loved ones; neither was she aware that her brother Matt was scudding over the blue waters of the Atlantic with fifty dollars of ill-gotten money in his pocket, which he considered was well earned; but he would have thrown it overboard rather than have Katie learn how it had come into his possession.

Had she known these things, dire would have been the imprecations heaped upon that mother's head; and if Katie had been obliged to travel on her knees, she would have found her way to Mr. Dean in order to tell him of the dastardly deed which had been perpetrated. But in blissful ignorance of these facts, on the last night of their stay in that cosy cottage, Katie slept and dreamed of the night when she sat by the children and sang Mother Goose Melodies till the weary eyelids closed in slumber, only to be awakened by the awful clang of fire-bells, and she rose in her bed shrieking,

“Our box, sixty-three, fire, fire!” Her mother overheard her and quickly came in to quiet her, for she did not wish Katie to think nor talk much about the fire, hoping that, in time, most of the occurrences in connection with the event would be eliminated from her mind. Up to a compar-

atively recent date, Mrs. Sharon had been a hard working, upright, honest woman ; but the sight of a fortune in jewels and money had kindled in her heart a latent fire of greed ; and the tempter had softly whispered of a way whereby she could make that fortune her own, and she had thus far had plain-sailing. The gems, worth several thousand of dollars, were secreted in a place of safety, yet occupying so prominent a position that she could almost continually keep her eye upon them. Katie, of course, knew nothing of their presence in the house ; neither did she imagine her mother capable of stooping to such measures of treachery and deception. Mrs. Sharon did not dare to offer them for sale for fear of their being recognized ; so she contented herself with keeping them as her own property, while Katie implicitly believed the story she had told her, and rejoiced to feel that through her instrumentality a happy family remained unbroken, and the gems of which she knew Mrs. Dean to be so proud, were saved from destruction by the flames.

In another week Katie and her mother were settled inmates of Mrs. Catlin's establishment. Besides the cretonne-covered chair and footstool, which Mrs. Sharon had brought for Katie, an

invalid chair was provided, in which she could wheel herself about from one room to another. In a few months she was considered an indispensable adjunct to the seminary; for, with a little application, Katie's fingers soon learned to darn nicely; and many rips and rents were repaired for the girls, stockings were darned, and buttons sewed on, to say nothing of the very creditable appearance of the fine laces which she carefully laundried for the more wealthy young ladies who attended the school.

CHAPTER IV.

A RARE THANKSGIVING.

“Beneath the spreading heavens,
 No creature but is fed,
And He who feeds the ravens
 Shall give His children bread.”



HE Faith Orphan Asylum in the city of New Haven is an institution conducted on the principle which its name indicates; having no capital, being wholly dependent on whatever contributions its friends see fit to offer. One hundred or more little waifs are continually being cared for in both body and soul, a band of Christian men and women having charge of the institution, and with care and good judgment disbursing whatever funds or other gifts are placed at their disposal. Ofttimes the matron does not know where the next day's meals are coming from; but in some way or other the Lord always provides.

The harvest was past. There had been a great deal of rain, and the corn had not thriven as well as usual. Potatoes rotted, and grapes mildewed, apples were wormy, and turnips pithy, cabbages were all leaf, and pumpkins were coarse-grained and tasteless ; and, to cap the climax, large quantities of hay had spoiled in the making, therefore farmers in general were pretty blue, and you know it is from the farm that our chief Thanksgiving-day supplies must come. Funds were low, provisions were slow in coming in, it was nearing the middle of November and there was scarcely a dollar in the treasury. Occasionally some kind farmer would furnish several bushels of potatoes or turnips, a grocer would send them a barrel of flour, a baker would call around with several baskets of bread, a milkman would bring a can of milk, or a butcher would send in a quarter of beef ; but somehow they were forgetting or growing weary in well doing. The middle of November was come and there was barely enough to furnish very meagre fare for the inmates of the institution. The matron knew the children were one and all expecting a grand thanksgiving feast. She had heard them talking of it as they played together, and had seen them holding mimic

dinners, where stones and chips and mud-pies underwent wonderful changes in imagination ; and now, though dreading the task, she felt it her duty to let them know something how matters stood. The children were assembled in the schoolroom, and had just finished morning devotions when the matron entered, spoke a few words to the teacher ; then, her voice trembling with emotion, addressed the school.

“ Dear children, I fear I have a great disappointment in store for you. For some reason our friends have been less liberal than usual ; and according to the present outlook we shall all have to go without our thanksgiving dinner. However, if our hearts are right, we can give thanks to God for his goodness in providing us with plain food, and He will smile on us as brightly as though we were rejoicing over a feast. We can have a thanksgiving in our hearts anyway ; and trust that next year we may be more prospered, and that having gone without this time, we shall then be all the better prepared to render abundant thanks to Him who has always stood near when the clouds of trouble were darkest. I tell you early, children, in order that you may be ready for the disappointment.”

With tears in her eyes and in her voice, the matron left the room, and many sorrowful little faces turned toward the teacher as she ascended the platform and stood by the desk. Touching the bell, she soon had the attention of every scholar; then said, "Children, how many of you have faith in prayer?" Every little hand was raised.

"How many of you have faith strong enough to believe if we each pray faithfully and expectantly, morning and night until Thanksgiving-day, that the Lord will provide for us a thanksgiving dinner?"

Again every little hand was lifted high.

"Very well! We will now unite in prayer."

Each head was bowed as the teacher prayed earnestly that God would remember the lonely orphans who had no kind fathers and mothers to provide for them a thanksgiving dinner, ending her petition with saying that every little one present faithfully believed that whatsoever they asked in Jesus' name they would surely receive. As they raised their heads the little faces shone with expectant joy; and, with light hearts, all went about their lessons. At night they repeated their prayers, and each succeeding morning and

night found the little orphan children beseeching the Great Giver of all good and perfect gifts to send them the much desired Thanksgiving-day feast. Day after day went by with no special gifts sent in, only a dollar here, and a dollar there, just enough to keep things going, and well that it was so, for a by-law of the institution maintained that under no circumstances should the institution ever contract one penny of debt; the founders having had implicit faith that the Lord would always provide. The faith of the children did not waver. If older persons did but possess the faith of children, how much more contentedly would life's burdens be borne, and how many dark torrents of trouble would be safely bridged over.

The children dreamed of the grand feast they would have, and talked about it as though it were a settled fact that they should have all the good things to eat that could be thought of. The night before Thanksgiving was come, and as the little white-robed forms knelt at their bedsides they prayed again that by the morrow the Lord would put it into some one's heart to send them some of the good things which He had given. Morning came and the inmates of the asylum

were assembled for devotions in the schoolroom, which on Sundays and holidays served as a chapel, and on this bright Thanksgiving morning all were paying strict attention to the president, a worthy minister of the gospel, as he told the children of the origin of Thanksgiving-day. He related to them the narrative of the Puritans setting apart a day for fasting and prayer, which same day was turned into one of feasting and rejoicing by the timely arrival of a ship-load of provisions; then added, that although those present were not obliged to fast, as there was yet the ordinary supply of food, still he trusted that, in their hearts, all would thank the Gracious Father that their lives were spared, that they had a comfortable dwelling-place, and food and clothing sufficient for present need. Then all joined in repeating the Lord's prayer. As the trembling voices uttered the words, "Give us this day our daily bread," there was a knock at the door.

The prayer being finished, the door was opened, and there stood a man bearing on his shoulders a huge sack full to overflowing with plump dressed turkeys, while behind him came another man carrying a mammoth hamper containing choice viands, fruits, nuts and confections. What a joy-

ful shout went up from the children! "The Lord has sent us a Thanksgiving dinner, we knew He would; we knew He would." Confusion prevailed. The little ones danced and capered about, they laughed and clapped their hands, while the white-haired pastor bowed his head and said, "Praised be the Lord." Then the teacher explained the words of the children, telling how they had daily prayed for a Thanksgiving feast and how implicit was their faith in God. Depositing their burdens, the men said there were others with provisions at the door; if some one would show them where to put them. President, matron, teacher and children all trooped down the stairs to the front door, opposite which stood a large truck drawn by four strong horses; and behind the truck in line were half a dozen farmers' wagons.

Then the unloading began, and what was not there! Bag after bag, and parcel after parcel found its way into the almost empty larder of the orphan asylum. Potatoes, turnips, apples, nuts, pickles, sweet-meats, delicious home-made bread, real old-fashioned pumpkin pies, and, oh—I cannot tell you all that was brought in for the children. Great tears rolled down the cheeks of

more than one sunbrowned farmer driving homeward over the rough roads, as he thought of the sight he had witnessed. Busy hands went to work, and before many hours there was spread such a feast as many of those little ones had never before seen ; in truth, numbers did not know the taste of many of the viands spread before them. Ranged about the tables were the children and as the reverend pastor rose to say grace, every little one joined in with him ; and such a thanksgiving as that prayer was !

Then they began to demolish the eatables, and it would have done your heart good to see the sight. If well-to-do people only realized how happy little hearts could be made, they would find themselves amply repaid for sending to them from time to time a portion of their bounteous supply. I doubt if throughout the country there was a more genuine Thanksgiving than that which was spent at the Faith Orphan Asylum ; and to this day there is not remaining one of those children who could be made to waver in their faith in God and prayer.

One of the worthy people into whose heart had been put a resolve to give to the Lord of his store, and who had been guided by an unseen

hand to deposit his thanksgiving offering at the door of the Faith Orphan Asylum, was Deacon Elijah Argyle. He had driven in from Westbridge, a distance of several miles, and had witnessed the evidences of the children's faith in prayer. His wife too had sent a bundle of home-knit stockings and mittens; they being the product of her spare moments. She had often spoken to her husband of the little ones in the asylum, and not infrequently thought of some time visiting the institution with a view to adopting some little waif, and bringing her out into the beautiful country to grow up in the midst of it all; and also to be a comfort to them in their declining years. It was ever so long since they had laid to rest, in the quiet country churchyard, a little sunbeam which had been lent to them for three happy years. As Deacon Argyle was returning from bringing in his last sack of vegetables, he saw standing in the wide hall-way a little maiden of perhaps three summers. She was looking up at him with wide-open eyes, her short black curls clustering about the round rosy face. Her pink calico apron was drawn closely about her chubby little form, as she stood with her hands behind her. She caught the twinkle of kindness that

lit up the gray eyes of the deacon, as he said : "Come to me, little one, here is a bright penny for you."

She walked slowly forward and held out one fat little hand, while the other still remained behind her. She took the proffered nickel, and then, as if on the impulse of the moment, brought forward the other hand, and, holding both up toward the deacon, looked earnestly into his honest face as she said, "I will tiss you for it, I love you."

Deacon Argyle caught her up in his great strong arms, and kissed the merry little face. She placed one hand on each rough cheek and said : "I ain't dot any papa. Annie has ; a big man with long whiskers."

She looked down at the short gray beard of the deacon as she added, "He couldn't take me 'cause he didn't have room for only one little girl, and I'm so lonesome."

Then she cried big salt tears that rolled down on the deacon's rough overcoat ; and he held the poor little tot closer in his strong embrace ; she seemed so much like his own little Ellen. With the child still in his arms, he sought out the matron of the institution in order to find whether the little one was to be had for the asking.

There were requirements necessary: namely, a person adopting a child must be a Christian, and possessed either of means or of a substantial mode of gaining a livelihood, in order to insure a proper training of mind, and that the child might have a prospect of a respectable education and support.

“Well,” said the deacon, “I’d like the refusal of this little one till I can go home and get my wife to come and see her. She’s been talkin’ for some time of takin’ a little girl for our own. “Ours died fourteen years ago, and this baby is e’en a’most the image of her. I own a good-sized farm in Westbridge—Primrose Bank, we call it—you may have heard of it—besides havin’ a little bank account; and as I’m first deacon in the church, I don’t see as there’s any hindrance that way.” Reluctantly leaving the little one behind him, Deacon Argyle started for home. He was half-a-mind to turn back and take the little one along with him now; but he’d got the refusal of her anyway, and he guessed he’d better talk about it with mother first.

Mother was well pleased at her husband’s description of the little orphan, and wanted to start right off the next day to see about adopting

her, and she did. Her great motherly heart went out to the little motherless one, and as she cuddled her in her arms, as they jolted along over the rough country roads, it seemed as if she had gone back fourteen years of her life to the time when she had clasped in her arms her own little blossom that had been so early transplanted to the beautiful garden of Heaven. Her name should be Ellen Douglas Argyle—that had been the name of their lost one ; and this should be another little Nellie. The child was a happy little body, and grew up free and innocent, in companionship with the birds and flowers of the field. She attended the village school, and had a few playmates among the children belonging to the scattered families in the old town of Westbridge.

As the years sped on she forgot that Mr. and Mrs. Argyle were not her own parents, neither could she remember any other home than the old house with the long slanting roof, under whose eaves were the mud-swallows' nests in summer; and where in winter hung long icicles almost as tall as herself, and which she could readily reach. Then there was the bank in front of the house, a rather steep descent down to the road, and Nellie could not remember the time when she had not

gathered there handfuls of yellow primroses. If any one had never told her she was adopted; if she could have lived on in blissful ignorance of the fact, as her foster-parents intended she should, perhaps the lines of her life would have been cast in different places. She might have grown up and lived on in the humdrum way so many had before done in the dull old town; nothing out of the common way ever entering her sphere. But things were ordered otherwise; and there came a rude awakening.

CHAPTER V.

THE STRUGGLE AT THE SPRING.

“ Oh, bitter words, like blasting rain,
And life is never the same again.”

N the Hepburne lot on the hill stands an old button-ball tree, its tall gray trunk surmounted by straggling branches, with here and there a few button-balls swaying ; the whole being boldly outlined against a hilly horizon. A part of the tree's roots are bare, and these projecting, overhang a basin of some four or five feet in diameter, and perhaps fifteen inches deep ; where up through the roots and mosses bubble the waters of a never-failing spring, clear as crystal. One can almost count the pebbles at the bottom of the pool. The leaves from the button-ball and the surrounding bushes fall into the basin, and, after whirling around for a few seconds, are carried by the centrifugal force to the edge of the pool, there forming a closely matted border.

Over the leaf-strewn margin bend feathery ferns and tall spikes of cardinal flowers, while around the plant-stalks winds the brilliant yellow dodder. The ground all about the base of the tree is covered with a velvety mass of dark green moss, in which grows sprays of partridge-vine dotted with bright red berries.

Overhead shines the soft June sun, warm yet soothing, giving forth so refreshing a warmth that one feels it to his very finger-tips and sighs to think the rare June days speed by so quickly. On the moss beside the spring reclines a girl of some ten summers. Occasionally she breathes a deep-drawn sigh, and then passionate sobs break the prevailing stillness, frightening away the robin who has ventured to drink from the pool. The lithe form trembles violently under the passionate fit of weeping which has entire control of the prostrate child. With an impatient gesture she starts up, and resting on one elbow looks down into the spring, while with the disengaged hand she dashes back a tangled mass of short black curls that have fallen about her face. The features reflected are not beautiful, neither are they passable just now, after the storm of weeping in which their owner had been indulging. Her fore-

head is rather low, eyes of dark gray, at times snapping like fire ; a thin, straight nose ; and small mouth, just now so tightly closed that the blood is forced away from the rather thin lips.

The girl lies so still that the robin cautiously ventures back and stands poised on one foot as he dips his beak into the water, then throwing back his head, quickly swallows a few drops of the liquid. She moves, and quick as a flash he is away and up in the branches of the tree singing or scolding as if he would burst his little throat. Nellie's silent thoughts find vent in words :— slowly they are spoken, the voice husky with suppressed emotion. “ I wonder if I am like those leaves down there. They drop off the tree, the wind whisks them around and into the spring, then they whirl round and round till I should think they'd be dizzy, and all of a sudden go plump among the hundreds of other leaves that lie matted together there on the bank. If you didn't keep pretty close watch of some one leaf you never in the wide, wide world could tell which tree or bush it came from, and I don't know as you could then, for they'd just as likely as not get all mixed up, anyhow. There, now, that little button-ball is off this tree, of course, for it's the only one of the kind

around here, for a long ways. The world is made up, I s'pose, of people that get mixed up just as much as those leaves do ; and, if what they say is true, p'raps nobody does know where I do belong. I'll go straight home and ask mother if she is my mother."

The child arose to go, but something arrested her attention. Her nerves were under great tension and fairly tingling to gain a little relaxation. In under the bank where she had been resting, in a thick black coil, lay a water-snake sunning himself.

" H'm, " she ejaculated, " I ain't afraid of you, I guess ; " and with both hands she picked up a large stone and forcibly threw it on to the snake. The missile bounded off and the black coil, unwinding, rapidly disappeared. Nellie recovered her bonnet, which had dropped into the spring, and then sauntered down through the meadow, keeping close to the brookside, where wound a narrow footpath. She was not in half as much of a hurry as she had been before discovering the snake ; consequently she trudged along absent-mindedly, snipping off the wild carrot blossoms, or robbing the daisies of their golden crowns.

Between the brook and the house down the hill

was a field of finely growing young millet. From the ten-acre lot on the other side of the house, Nellie saw her father hastening toward the millet-field, meanwhile shouting at the top of his voice, "Hey, there, yeou critters, git eout o' that ere millet, or I'll warm ye." But the cattle were there before him and had made sad havoc among the young shoots. Nellie could not help smiling; the scene was certainly ludicrous, although it was through her neglect that the bars had been left down. From the millet her mind reverted to the party of school-children who were going berrying that morning, and then her trouble came surging over her again. Florence Pritchard was to be one of the party, and Nellie would not go because Florence was going. At school, the day before, the two girls had had a slight altercation which Florence had ended by the retort, "Well, you ain't Nell Argyle, anyway; you're only adopted, and nobody knows where you do belong."

"Only adopted!" What could she mean? Over and over in her brain, Nellie had been turning the words of that angry taunt. All through the night, as she restlessly tossed about, she had seen those hateful words staring at her in letters of fire. Whichever way she turned she saw them

still. She had eaten no breakfast, and her mother, noticing the red eyelids and poor appetite, had said, as soon as the dishes were done, "I am afraid you have one of those headaches this morning, dear; run out and get a little fresh air before the sun gets higher. It always does you good, you know," so Nellie, who needed no second bidding, had started off for her favorite haunt, the spring. After all, she had concluded it was best to go and ask mother all about it, and know for certain whether there was any truth in what Florence had said.

It was almost ten o'clock when this decision was reached. Mrs. Argyle was wondering what kept Nellie so long, as she sat in the back door hulling strawberries only just picked from the garden-patch. The motherly face was quite flushed with the work she had been engaged in, but notwithstanding her fatigue she sat humming an old church tune. The berries were almost done as Nellie came up the garden path, on each side of which grew just such old-fashioned flowers as thrived in the dear old garden where I have passed many happy hours. Tiger and yellow lilies lifted their heads above the more modest spider-lilies, while white and purple iris contrasted

most agreeably with the brilliant hues of the former. Ribbon-grass and rosemary grew humbly at the foot of the damask rosebush ; while matrimony and single red rose vines tangled together on the trellises at each side of the grape arbor. Through all this wealth of bloom came Nellie, her sun-bonnet dangling by the strings, but it dropped to the ground as she sat down on the white doorstone, and looked up at Mrs. Argyle with a very pitiful face.

“ What is, it, dearie,—why, isn’t your head better yet, child ? ” and Mrs. Argyle tenderly stroked the curly head which sank sobbing into her lap. When the heavy sobs ceased, between the lesser ones came the question, “ Mother, are you my real mother ? ”

Mrs. Argyle was so astounded she could not think for an instant how to best answer the child. Then she said, “ Why do you ask that question, Nellie ? ”

“ Because yesterday at school Florence Pritchard said I was only adopted, and that nobody knew where I did belong.”

“ Florence Pritchard is a very unkind little girl.”

“ But ain’t you my own mother, truly ? Tell me yes, and then I don’t care what any one says.”

“Haven’t I always been a mother to you, child?” How it made her heart ache—the thought that now the bond of love which had so closely bound them might be about to be broken asunder. She could not bear to frame the words which might have much to do with making or marring Nellie’s future. She could not know how the news would act upon the child when aware it was truth. Nellie’s answer, and another question were already falling on her ear.

“Yes, you have always been a mother to me, but what did Florence mean, then?”

“Nellie, dear, I certainly will tell you truly, though I had fully intended you should not know for years yet, and perhaps never on this earth. However, Florence’s meddling, or in all probability, her mother’s, makes an explanation really necessary. It is true that you are our adopted daughter, but as dear to us as our own flesh and blood. Years ago I had a little Nellie, bright and winsome, who grew to be three years old, and then she was taken away from us. Only those who have themselves laid away their little ones can ever know how sad our lives were, and how drearily the years rolled on. As one by one they passed away, the longing desire for another

little sunbeam to come and brighten our home grew stronger and stronger, though the wound at our hearts was by no means healed over, and the first little Nellie would never be less dear to us ; but, if possible, far dearer. We finally decided that some day we would go in search of some little girl who needed a home. When that decision was reached, it seemed as if the way was directly opened for us. One Thanksgiving, father took his offering to a children's home, and by accident or, as we always said, providentially, came across you ; and the moment he saw you loved you, for you looked so much like our lost one. You were then in an orphan asylum, but they gave you to us for our own, and so you have always been and always shall be."

Nellie was listening intently, but at that moment Deacon Argyle came up, very red in the face, and considerably out of breath, while anger blazed in his usually kindly eyes.

"Nellie, did you leave those bars down?"

"Yes, sir."

"I shall have to punish you severely. It was gross carelessness, mother, I'm afeard the millet is about ruined."

Mrs. Argyle glanced at Nellie. The child was

so full of pent-up grief she could not have her even scolded now.

“She did not do it intentionally; did you, child?”

Nellie shook her head which was bowed, and resting in her hands. She could not find voice to answer. The Deacon caught the warning glance cast at him by his wife, and said abruptly,

“What’s the matter now—anything of more consequence than my three acres of millet?”

“Florence Pritchard has taunted our little girl with being an adopted child.”

Mr. Argyle bristled up all in an instant.

“Them Pritchards are a meddlin’ lot; and I’d thank ‘em to mind their own business.”

Though occasionally angry with her for a moment, still he loved the child as tenderly as on the day of their first meeting. But if in human nature there was one trait more than another which the Deacon could not in any wise tolerate, it was meddling gossiping; and to think they should dare attack his Nellie was altogether too much for endurance. The anger toward her died out of his voice as he said,

“Of course you’re our girl. Didn’t the Lord and the law give her to us, wife? If Mrs.

Pritchard don't stop meddlin' with my affairs, I'll have her brought afore the church. I will, sure as preachin'. She's got altogether too long a tongue. Better be lookin' arter her own darter, instead o' meddlin' with other folkses. Don't you mind a word they say, Nellie. You can hold your head as high as the next one, for there aint no common blood in your veins. You've got the old blue blood in you, same as all the Argyles has, and don't you mind 'em.

"Adopted," he muttered as he started back to his work. "H'm, guess I know a thing or two yet. Don't s'pose I'm quite such an old dolt as some folks seem to think I am, to adopt such a little waif out of an asylum and will her all our property and bring her up like a Christian without findin' out as much as I could about her. It don't make any difference how much I know or don't know, there can't nobody make me believe she ain't aristocracy, and she's my darter, too, by law ; and some day I hope the poor leetle creeter 'll know who her own kin be or was. Hope in all goodness 'twon't be till arter wife and I are over yonder in the churchyard ; fer I couldn't noways bear to give her up now. Perhaps she hain't got any folks and perhaps she has. - Them Pritchards"—

he said no more but went to work hoeing his potato patch with a vengeance.

In the meantime Mrs. Argyle and Nellie went into the little summer kitchen, a shed-like addition to the regular living-room, but sheltered from the weather by a sudden rise in the land, against which was built a stone wall. Along the edge of the grassy knoll and slanting over to the shed were trellises where wild grape-vines clambered, thus keeping the kitchen comparatively well shaded, and at the same time a pleasant place to work in. Mrs. Argyle went about preparing dinner, making the short-cake while Nellie mashed and sweetened the berries. Nellie said very little, never once referring to her new-found knowledge. She seemed stunned by the facts as presented to her. Mr. Argyle's words did not seem to weigh much upon her mind. She felt he was endeavoring to make the blow less severe, yet she would like to know what he meant, and whether she really was somebody in particular. She did venture the remark,—

“What did father mean by blue blood, mother?” and the answer,

“I have told you all I can, Nellie dear,” silenced her; but it aroused another question in her mind,

and that was, "Could there be more, that for some reason or other could not be told to her?" Then she bravely and sensibly reasoned that she would wait till they should see fit to make further revelations, if such there were to be made. The child of ten had grown years older in the last few hours. A cross had been given to her to carry, which would be burdensome for years yet to come. Another thing mother had said, though; and that was, she should see the dress she wore when she came to the asylum. Perhaps she should find a little comfort in that. Dinner was over and the house tidied up for the Sabbath, and Mrs. Argyle was about to fulfill her promise to Nellie, when the west door opened unceremoniously and a neighbor walked in. She removed her hat and using it as a fan, sat down in the rocking-chair by the window, saying,

"Lovely afternoon, Mis' Argyle, ain't it? Too nice to stay indoors. I was a sayin' so to Geofrey this noon, so thought I'd run in for a little while and sit with you." She paused long enough to put down her hat and take from her pocket her knitting. As she worked and rocked, her tongue ran on.

"Got lots of strawberries that want pickin',

ain't you? I see the cattle have been in your millet. Did the berryin' party leave the bars down? My! it is dretful warm! This is about the coolest place I know of, and I said so to Geoffrey this very mornin' that Mrs. Argyle's west window in the shade of the cherry-tree was about the breeziest place in all Westbridge. Are you goin' to have any cherries to pick on shares? for if you have I'll send little Geoff over. I'm wantin' some to do up."

Here she paused to catch her breath, while Nellie looked daggers at her, wishing in her heart that for once in her life Sabra Denton would stay at home when she wasn't wanted. She had such a faculty for dropping in when there was the least prospect of anything going on, and somehow she knew intuitively, or otherwise, the ins and outs of nearly every family in Westbridge. One could not mention a person for miles around but that Sabra, as every one called her, could give some interesting information regarding them, and thus it was that though a welcome guest in some homes, in others she was a terror to be studiously let alone, and harbored as short a time as courtesy demanded. She knew full well that a ball had been set to rolling, and her incidental dropping-

in was to ascertain, if possible, just how far it had gone in its revolutions. Mrs. Argyle had some idea of what Nellie's feelings were at this time so she said, "Nellie dear, you may get that roll I spoke of out of the left-end of the large red chest, near the top. Do not disturb the other things if you can avoid it."

With a grateful glance toward her mother, the child left the room.

"Bring it down and let me see it, if it's anything pretty," remarked inquisitive Sabra, but Nellie was beyond hearing and it was well she was, for respect was something Sabra Denton never commanded, either from children or their elders ; and Nellie would have given her an answer.

The newsmonger of the village, she had brought herself into positions many times that would have been humiliating in the extreme to an ordinary person. She, however, caring nothing about any reflections upon herself, was well pleased with the hubbubs and furors created by her busy twaddle. Although, ostensibly, her reason for dropping in had been to enjoy the cool breeze at Primrose Bank, the real motive came to light at last. Sabra's last remark had met with no response from Mrs. Argyle ; and both

had knitted vigorously for a moment or two, when the former said, "They tell me, Mrs. Argyle, that Nellie ain't your very own child."

"Indeed!"

"Well, Mis' Pritchard was a-tellin' me——"

"Nellie is our child, I believe, and I sincerely wish Mrs. Pritchard would leave my private affairs alone." The emphasis on the "my" would have silenced any one but Sabra, who continued,

"Oh, I don't mean no harm, Mis' Argyle, but I was a-sayin' as how little resemblance there was between you two and Nellie, and I was a-sayin' how toppin' and high strung she was, not a bit like you nor the deacon, and then Mis' Pritchard up and told me all about you adoptin' her when she was a leetle mite of a thing, and what a hard time you've had a-bringin' her up, and what a tantrummy little piece she is, and all such. I allus thought Nellie was a pretty good sort of a little girl if she was fiery. For my part, I wouldn't give a snap for a young 'un that hadn't got any spunk."

"There are a few people this village would be better off without, and Mrs. Pritchard is one of them. She has been discussing affairs about

which she knows comparatively nothing, and if she isn't very careful her busy tongue will bring her trouble. Deacon Argyle says if she meddles further with his private affairs he will bring her up before the church."

" Laws, Mis' Argyle, you don't say. Now you won't lisp a word I've said, will you, for I don't want to get the woman into no trouble. I was down there a-spendin' the afternoon with her, and Florence was a-tellin' how high-flyin' Nellie was at school, and how she couldn't get along with her peaceably noways; so that set Mis' Pritchard a-talkin' about it. She said that temper would be the ruin of her yet, and she felt so sorry for you and the deacon; but laws, it hain't done no harm yet, and I shan't ever speak of it again if it's offendin' to you."

" It has done harm already, irreparable harm. My little Nellie was a contented happy child, as much so as if she had been born under this roof, and had never heard a word breathed but that she was our own flesh and blood; and but for the tongues of meddling gossipers would know nothing different now. For Florence Pritchard to take the news to school and taunt Nellie with it is a scandalous shame. It would be well for

Mrs. Pritchard to bear in mind the fact that lame chickens come home to roost. I don't wish you to go about the neighborhood raking it up and making village talk of it, for Nellie is almost heart-broken now over Florence's cruel words.

"Well, I'm mighty sorry I've got into the mess, anyhow, but, Mis' Argyle, you can depend on it, I won't never mention it if you feel so about it."

A coolness settled over the conversation and Sabra soon rose to go, saying she must run over and see Mis Wooster a few minutes, for she wanted to get her receipt for canning strawberries ; adding, "I s'pose you ain't got any you want picked on shares, I wanted to get a few." But Mrs. Argyle did not take the hint ; neither did she have any berries to spare. When Sabra had taken her departure Mrs. Argyle went up to the store-room where the old red chest was kept. On the floor sat Nellie with two or three gauzy little garments in her lap. How caressingly she handled the soft clothing she had worn when a baby. That she had been somebody's darling was evident, for the texture was of the finest, and the drawn-work and hemstitching done by hand : while the narrow lace fulled into the neck and sleeves was of spider-web fineness. Mrs. Argyle

passed on to her own room, thinking the child would be better left alone.

The afternoon was passing and tea-time came. Nellie had not put in an appearance, so Mrs. Argyle went in search of her. There lay the child on the floor sound asleep, her hand resting on the little garments wet with her tears. Poor little Nellie! the awakening had come, and she knew she was an adopted child. As always at some period in everyone's life the wheel of destiny begins to revolve; so that time had come in the heretofore placid experience of Nellie Argyle. To some it seems as if the world moved on year in and year out and brought no changes. Humdrum everyday life is the same to-day as yesterday; but suddenly, with no warning, there comes an instant when on some little pivot the great machinery of important events begins to turn; and, before one realizes the fact, wheels are revolving, belts are running, and the steady rumble of the machinery of the universe tells of the speedy approach of change.

CHAPTER VI.

A FATEFUL STORM.

“ Little—little do we know
What the future hath in store,
What there is that lieth before
Any one of us!”



HE long summer days were over; the katydids had ceased their rasping call, fields lay bare and brown, waiting for the softly falling snows. Had you dropped into the grocery-store down in the village, you would have found several farmers gathered about the air-tight stove, and as the hickory-knots blazed and crackled, the men, seated around on sugar and flour barrels, or soap or cracker boxes, would have told you of the wonderful harvest they had reaped. This one had an enormous crop of corn; that one had acres of first-class wheat; another was the proud possessor of a crop of potatoes that couldn't be beaten; and all were correspondingly jubilant over their good fortune.

Deacon Argyle had run down to the store to see if there was any mail, it being a regular country store containing groceries, ginghams and notions, together with a few hogsheads of old New England rum and hard cider; while the proprietor, Jared Cooper, gloried in the title of postmaster, and delighted in passing over his counter the scant amount of mail-matter which came to the two small villages of Fairbury and Westbridge.

Neither place, of itself, was large enough to demand a post-office; but, after some bickering, Government had named Fairbury as a village where the post-office should be located; it also to be the place for the reception and delivery of Westbridge mail-matter.

The deacon was dilating on his extraordinary millet crop, which, notwithstanding its grave pull-back, had rallied and grown miraculously.

"Here, deacon, is a letter from York," said Jared, leaning over the counter and looking inquiringly into the deacon's face. "Don't appear to be very heavily loaded," he added, as he watched the deacon wonderingly examine the superscription. He made no reply, but turned to go. "Hold on a minute. Air we agoin' to give the parson a donation this Thanksgiving?"

"Yes, yes;" and he turned back to join the crowd around the stove.

"Deacon Argyle, you start the ball a-rollin', and we'll all give it a push. What's your share?" said Jared, as he familiarly brought his hand down on the deacon's shoulders.

"Fifteen bushel o' potatoes, as smooth as the back o' your hand," he replied, and then the others chimed in; they were in the giving mood.

Barrels of apples and bushels of turnips, onions, corn and beans, sugar-cured hams, and strips of bacon, all were promised in quick succession, together with several cords of hickory thrown in. All agreed to go early Thanksgiving morning, and leave their donation at the parsonage door, and then, with a cheery "Good-night," the deacon turned his steps toward home. It was after nine o'clock when he arrived there, and Nellie had retired. Laying aside his overcoat and heavy boots, he seated himself beside the small stand which Mrs. Argyle had drawn up to the open fireplace. He held the letter in close proximity to the lamp, at the same time throwing back his head in order to obtain the proper focus, though I doubt much whether he realized why he did so.

He read the letter over to himself, and then aloud to his wife, who sat opposite, her deft fingers, busy with needle and yarn, filling up openings in the coarse blue homeknit sock which was stretched over her hand.

“I can’t make out what it means, wife! Nobody’s said anything about Parson Thorpe goin’ and nobody wants him to—not as I know of. It must be some mistake, but,” he continued, again closely examining the envelope, “it’s Deacon E. Argyle, Westbridge, so it’s to me, of course.”

“Look over the Year Book and see if the man’s name is among the preachers without charge,” suggested Mrs. Argyle. So the deacon searched the Year Book for the name signed at the foot of the letter.

“Ah, here it is,” and, with his fingers resting on the page the deacon read, Robert A. Mitchell, D.D., New York City. That was all, and that was the name signed to the letter.

“Well,” said he, folding up the letter and sliding it back into the envelope, “I’ll just drop him a line to say there ain’t any vacancy here, for we’re all well satisfied with Parson Thorpe.” So the letter was written and mailed next day. Mrs. Argyle sat watching her husband, his stiff

fingers guiding the pen, as he scratched off a few lines.

"It 'ud be a mighty good chance for some country church to get a D.D. for a minister, and all just because he wanted just a few years of rest and quiet after the strain of his heavy labor," she ventured to remark.

But the letter went, and the days sped by, and Thanksgiving eve arrived. At nightfall a blinding snowstorm set in. Little drifts were already piling up on the window-sills, and when an outside door was opened, a gust of wind would send a flurry of snowflakes into the room. On such a night one is perfectly content to rest his feet on the fender, and be thankful he has a cheery, cozy home to stay in. Deacon Argyle sat thus beside the fireplace while his wife was busy making final preparations for the morrow. She was one of the few people who invariably take time by the forelock; everything is done decently and in good season, one piece of work never crowds upon another; but all of the intricate duties of a farm house fitting into place as nicely as the pieces of a dissected puzzle. And so it was that the little odds and ends of work done this evening would make it very easy for all to attend service on the

morrow, and still have a grand Thanksgiving dinner, such as only a New England housewife can prepare.

Nellie sat on a low stool beside her father, her chin resting in her hands, as she gazed into the roaring fire, and watched the sparks ascending the wide-mouthed chimney. Their quiet was suddenly disturbed by the sound of stamping feet, as some one removed the snow from his shoes, then there came a hurried knock at the door. Mrs. Argyle was there as soon as the hand touched the knocker, and she swung the door wide open, while a young man, whose broad shoulders were laden with snow, entered the room, and with him a cutting blast of frosty, snow-freighted air. He spoke hurriedly :

“ Deacon Argyle, father is very sick ; we fear he has had a shock ; will you come over at once ? Mother is alone with him, and I must hurry back.”

Struck almost dumb with amazement, the deacon and his wife in unison gasped, “ Parson Thorpe had a shock ! ”

It took Mrs. Argyle but an instant to comprehend ; then, hastily gathering together the deacon’s storm-garments, she assisted him in well muffling himself.

"Be careful of your footing, father; I see the snow is making fast." Then to the young man, "Tell your mother she has my sympathy and prayers. I would go myself, but dare not venture out in such a storm, neither would it be right to leave Nellie alone. Father, you had better stop for Mrs. Sackett on the way. She lives quite near, and may be of assistance. Here is your lantern and some matches; you will have need of both, I think, for the snow is blinding, and the wind is strong."

Nellie stood by the door with her mother, peering out through the crack into the darkness, which was made even more plainly visible in one little place by the flickering light from the lantern. As they closed the door on the retreating forms which bent before the biting blast, both instinctively walked to the fireplace and with arms about each other stood looking into the cheerful blaze. Nellie broke the silence by asking, "Do you suppose this is a blizzard, mother?"

"I do not know, child, I never experienced one; but this is a fearful storm; I think I never saw one worse. It can't possibly last like this a great while; I am anxious about your father; I do hope

he wont try to come back alone to-night if it continues in this way."

After sitting for a little while, Nellie went to her room over the kitchen, leaving Mrs. Argyle by the fireplace, busy with her never-failing piece of knitting. This time it was a scarlet mitten, one of a pair which mother wanted to place in Nellie's Christmas stocking. The click of the knitting-needles beat swifter time than the tall old clock which stood at the end of the room, its heavy iron weights moving almost imperceptibly as the hours sped by. A whirring sound, and the solemn tones, which had measured over a century of time, rang out the hour of eleven. The storm still raged; the wind howled and swept around the house, piling the snow up to the window-sills; in some places the drifts reaching far up on to the panes. Wide-spreading branches of the great maples bent and creaked as the gale swept over them.

Mrs. Argyle stepped to the door to look out, but the snow almost blinded her, and the wind fairly took away her breath. She then went to the window determined so see what there was to be seen. With a cloth rung out of hot water, she melted the frost from the pane and gazed out in-

to the Stygian darkness. Now and then in the distance she caught a glimmer of light ; it was surely a miracle if any one could manage to keep a lantern burning in such a gale. Hoping it was the deacon so nearly home, she placed a light before the window and set herself about the task of keeping the frost from the panes. Soon, thinking she heard his voice, she opened the door and beheld him floundering in the snow which had piled high up against the rear of the house. Almost exhausted he sank into the chair she had placed for him. As soon as he could find voice to speak he said.,

“ Parson Thorpe has preached his last sermon, wife.”

“ Then he is dead ? ”

“ Yes, as good as gone when I got there. I’ve left Mrs. Sackett with ‘em ; but what on earth we’re to do to-morrow I don’t know. It’s a union meetin’, you remember, and there’ll be no preacher there.”

“ Well, well, don’t worry about it, there’ll be no need of one to-morrow, if this storm keeps up.”

“ That’s true. I had hard work to get home. Leon came as far as the turnpike ; he would see me within sight of home anyhow.”

"I was worried about you, the wind is so high, and the snow so blinding. I'm afraid it will be the worse for a good many who are out this night. It acts to me like one of those Dakota blizzards we frequently read about; I do hope it isn't. Hark! Did you hear that crash? It seemed to shake the house."

"Some tree gone down, likely," the deacon replied; "perhaps the old chestnut down by the brook, or the black-mulberry back of the store-house; for some time I've noticed that was a-splittin'."

"Listen! didn't that sound like a human voice?" Mrs. Argyle almost whispered.

"Some; guess it was the train whistle over to the junction. It'll get stalled I reckon pretty soon if 'tain't already. Them car screeches do sound like human voices sometimes. I declare for't, if the snow ain't up to the window-sill already. Why, it don't seem as if it could keep on at this rate very much longer. I feel dreadful sorry for poor Mrs. Thorpe, she's so patient and quiet, poor soul, but I'm mighty glad I left Mis, Sackett there. With Leon and her, they'll get along comfortably. It makes it bad this snow does. We'll have ter have a preacher from some-

where, or else hold a union prayer-meetin'. I wonder if that Doctor Mitchell I got that letter from—perhaps he'd like to take the pulpit now, but to-morrow is what I'm worried about."

"Well, father," said Mrs. Argyle, "I wouldn't worry, let the morrow take thought for the things of itself. The Lord knows we're in want of a preacher, and if it's best for us to have one to-morrow, he'll send one along."

"Well, we'll have to wait and see what to-morrow brings."

How often those words are spoken, and how often the morrow holds in store much that shall influence our whole future.

Bright and clear Thanksgiving morning dawned, and Deacon Argyle awoke with a sense of the great responsibility resting upon him. Being first deacon in the church, the brunt of the planning and work devolved upon him, and all relied on his sound judgment and excellent management to keep the machinery of the church in good running order. The snow was about four feet deep on a level this memorable morning, and a path was the first thing to be attended to. The cattle and fowls would have to be reached and fed;

so the Deacon fell to work with a will and made a way to the barn and chicken-coop.

After breakfast he would go to the parsonage, then the thought came that this was the morning for donation. Would the men pluck up ambition enough to attempt travel over the roads in their present condition? In all probability they would, for as yet none knew of the calamity which had befallen them. However, the deacon started out with his snow-plough, and having reached the post-office told Jared Cooper of the pastor's death.

"No, you don't say so! I'm powerful sorry, and to-day to be a union meetin', too. Folks'll have to be on the road pretty soon, I reckon, to get there in time for service, but who will you get to take charge? Did you ever see such a storm, deacon? Beats all my recollections.

"By the way, the telegraph wire is broke down, but the last dispatch as came over it was from the midnight express. She's stalled over in the Carmel Cut, and there's several passengers aboard. Do you suppose it'll be possible ter reach 'em? The drifts are something terrible I should judge by looking round; but git several together, and you might git 'em to a little pleasanter quarters. It'll be a mighty glum Thanksgivin' there, I

reckon, if some one don't do somethin'. There ain't much to eat aboard, and I guess we'll all have to share our turkeys with strangers."

To this Deacon Argyle made answer, "They'll be thrice welcome, if we can only get at 'em ; but the Cut's a mean place for a train ter get stalled in, unless it's lucky enough to be at one end or the other." His mind now engrossed with thoughts of the imprisoned travellers, the deacon made his way toward the parsonage, thinking perhaps he should fall in with some of the men who were bringing donations, nor was he wrong in his surmise. Meeting several who, like himself, had taken recourse to their snow-ploughs, he told each one of the pastor's sudden death, and of the stalled train with its suffering passengers ; and, accordingly, one and all, after leaving their burdens at the parsonage door, turned their horses' heads in the direction of the Cut.

The farmers did not find it necessary to keep to the roads, for the unbroken expanse of snow lay over the tops of the fences, thus making it feasible to take a bee-line for the ridge of hills which lay along to the southeast. Indeed, it was a picturesque sight, that long ridge of rocks, its fissures and gullies filled up with snow, and the spruce

and fir trees heavily laden. Driving around to the western end of the Cut, they discovered the object of their search. To all appearances, the engine had run into an enormous drift which almost entirely filled up the entrance to the Cut, and there was the train half buried in snow. A few men out reconnoitring, gladly hailed the half-dozen farmers, who, with their ploughs, drove as near to the train as possible, then with a word to their steady old farm-horses left them to stand while it was ascertained what could be done for the relief of those on board.

"We're most in need of some breakfast," said the conductor, "and we have no facilities for preparing any, nor much to prepare, for that matter. Does your town boast a hotel, or what can we do?"

As usual, Deacon Argyle was spokesman. "No, sir, we don't own no hotel, but there's plenty of farmers around who'll be only too glad to share with their brethren in distress. We'll go inside and see what we can do. How many passengers are there?"

"Oh, not more'n a dozen besides the train hands."

"Then we can dispose of them without any difficulty," replied the deacon.

They boarded the train, and were soon in conversation with the passengers. One tall, commanding-looking gentleman laid his hand on Deacon Argyle's shoulder and said, "Sir, I shall be under lasting obligation to you if you will find comfortable quarters for my wife and daughter here." Taking a card from his pocket and handing it to the deacon, he added, "Mrs. Mitchell is already suffering from a severe headache, and her nerves are very much unstrung."

"Glad to make your acquaintance, Doctor; Providence has surely sent you along. I judge from this card that you are the identical man who wrote me a letter a short time ago."

"Indeed! Have I, then, the pleasure of addressing Deacon Elijah Argyle?"

"That's my name, Doctor Mitchell, and I reckon you're a godsend. Things have changed mightyily in the last few hours, but wife said it 'ud come out all right. Our pastor died last night; had an apoplectic stroke."

Dr. Mitchell expressed his regrets.

"We are to have a union meetin' to-day, and, with no pastor and no way of letting the people know, I'm all in a quandary. I was thinkin' of you this mornin', and wonderin' if, perhaps, you

wouldn't like ter come now and be our regular pastor. They generally leave such things pretty much to me, and I reckon I speak the mind of all when I say I'd like to have you think about it. At any rate, perhaps you could help us out this mornin'—but sho! it's no time for me to be discussin' this while the ladies are not made comfortable. See here, doctor, I've only my plough here; but if you'll wait half or three-quarters of an hour, I'll go home and come back with my sleigh, and you and your wife and daughter can come to my house and welcome, and stay as long as you like."

"It wants twenty minutes of nine," said Dr. Mitchell; "and if I am to assist with this morning's service the sooner I get to your house the better. Then we have several shawls and rugs with us, and it seems to me as though, with them, Mrs. Mitchell and Olga could be made quite comfortable on that snow-plough. My wife needs rest and quiet at once, for ever since last night when the engineer blew that fearful shrieking whistle she has been entirely unnerved."

"Just as you say, Doctor, just as you say; of course, it's a rough-looking affair but it runs smoothly."

"Never mind the looks as long as she gets out of this hubbub."

In a few moments Deacon Argyle, with Dr. Mitchell and family, were fleeting over the meadows and fences toward Primrose Bank. Soon the long steep hill was in view and the tall church-spire; then they crossed the bridge over the ice-bound river and passed on through the village up the broad avenue, which in summer was shaded most delightfully by stately maples, their bare branches being now weighted down with snow. Acre after acre of white stretched away in every direction; the houses lay half-buried in the drifts; while here and there was occasionally to be seen a man tunnelling his way through a huge snow-bank. Not a fence nor a shrub was discernible. Dr. Mitchell thought it would be a very slim congregation that would be able to meet any preacher at the church they had just passed. Impulsive little Nell stood with her face against the pane looking down the road.

"Mother," she called, "here comes father with the plough full of people. Who can they be?"

Mrs. Argyle and Nellie were at the door as the Deacon drove up. What a different Thanksgiv-

ing than had been anticipated, all were to have ! Breakfast having been served, and Mrs. Mitchell made comfortable, the doctor seated himself by the open grate in the wide, low-ceiled sitting-room, rubbing his hands and now and then turning the palms toward the genial blaze. Deacon Argyle stood with his hand on the high mantel as he thoughtfully watched the doctor, evidently expecting him to say something. The doctor spoke, " Well, Deacon Argyle, of course I am not prepared to occupy any pulpit ; but, under the circumstances, shall be only too glad to aid you ; and in regard to the other matter, I am as yet free to accept a charge wherever I may be called. I had not again written to the gentleman whose letter was sent you by mistake. I had been informed there was a vacant pulpit at Westridge."

" Westridge ? Why, this is Westbridge !— that's where the mistake must lie," said Deacon Argyle, and stepping to the secretary he took out the letter. " Ah, yes, it is Westridge. Singular, isn't it, that I have a namesake. I never knew Elijah Argyles were so common before."

It seemed that Providence meant to send Dr. Mitchell to Westbridge after all ; and in a short

time, under such inauspicious circumstances he preached his trial sermon. While sitting in his pew a thought dawned upon the deacon's mind, and as it grew and developed, he felt that in truth God had a wise purpose in view when he allowed so unusual a train of circumstances. Ah, well! a fine discourse was delivered, notwithstanding the doctor's excuses, and in the fair-sized congregation every head was kept turning as people looked one at another, as much as to say, "When have we before heard such a sermon!" At Deacon Argyle's, a genuine New England Thanksgiving-day was passing. Without, all was spotlessly white, overhead a variable sky giving promise of more snow. Within was a mammoth gobbler, attended by all his satellites, in the shape of vegetables, pumpkin pies, Indian puddings, and other delectables which combine to make up a real Thanksgiving dinner. Twilight had deepened, and the cheerful light from the fire in the old-fashioned chimney-place threw flickering shadows dancing into the far corners of the long kitchen; and here where the blaze was brightest, and the most homelike air reigned, all were gathered as night dropped her dusky curtain over the snowclad earth.

"It makes me think of old times when I was a boy at home," said Dr. Mitchell. "Many times have I sat at the twilight hour and watched the fantastic shadows thrown by the blazing logs of the fire; I, meanwhile, building castles in the air till, in imagination, the wealth of the Cæsars lay at my feet, and every rock in the field seemed to have proven an open sesame." And thus with reminiscences and anecdotes, was the evening pleasantly passed.

The morrow came, and with it knowledge that throughout New England travel was pretty much at a standstill. Miles of railroad tracks were covered with snow, in some places the drifts reaching to the telegraph wires. It would be days at least before trains would be running. Dr. Mitchell and family would remain over Sunday anyway; and then, too, there was Parson Thorpe's funeral to be attended. The Sabbath dawned, and it was necessary to dispose of the dead preacher's body. No hearse nor carriage could be procured, as was customary, from the neighboring city. No horses could draw the load to the cemetery on the hill, so what was to be done but the best that could be under the circumstances. The body decently prepared for

burial, and in its coffin, was placed in a large farm-wagon and that drawn by some fifty men across the lots and up the hill to the vault in the cemetery, and there deposited to await the melting of the snow.

A meeting of the deacons was held, a call was extended to Dr. Mitchell, and by him accepted. Then came the question, "What can be done for Mrs. Thorpe?" For thirty years her husband had faithfully ministered to them; but a small country church seldom pays a salary that admits of much being laid by for a rainy day; consequently Mrs. Thorpe and her son Leon had very little to fall back upon. True, Leon was a young man, but he was preparing for college; and Mrs. Thorpe would listen to no plan that should take him out of school.

"Can she sew?" said Dr. Mitchell to the deacon.

"My wife says she can't be beat. There ain't a woman in Westbridge, nor Fairbury neither, that can hold a candle to her sewin'," was the reply.

"Then, I am confident my wife can procure for her any amount of fine sewing if Mrs. Thorpe so desires."

"Well, it does beat all," said the deacon, "and

there's Captain Alden's old house, the prettiest little cottage ever was, and empty too; and she can have it for a song," so Mrs. Thorpe was consulted and arrangements completed, and Christmas time found Leon Thorpe and his mother occupants of the pleasant Alden cottage, while Dr. Mitchel and family were ensconced in the cosy little brown parsonage.

CHAPTER VII.

THE ACCIDENT ON THE POND.

“ And though his plans he never sheweth thee,
It is His wisdom that it should be so.”

T was nearing sundown on a cold March day. Near the horizon dark clouds swiftly sailed over a pale yellow sky, and the dull gray atmosphere that prevailed seemed to fill one with gloomy forebodings. It was, however, no time to indulge in such feelings, for on the morrow Commencement exercises were to be held at Lakeside Academy, and the professor, together with several pupils who were to take prominent parts, had remained after school-hours for a final rehearsal. The last to pass out of the building were Professor Northrop and Leon Thorpe, the former speaking encouraging words to the latter as he bade him good-evening. In their recitations a good-natured rivalry had existed between Leon and the village doctor's son, Ralph, but the former had won the

honorable rank of valedictorian, and when such announcement was made, first after the professor to come forward with hearty congratulations was Ralph Strong.

“ Well, old boy, I’m glad you’ve got it, for you’ve won it fair and square. We’ll try a race again some day when we get fairly settled under the elms at old Yale ; ” and so the honors were gracefully conceded to Leon, who had earned and well deserved them. The boys were fast friends, and, as intimated by Ralph’s remark, intended entering Yale together; having laid their plans, as boys often will, that after the four years, course Leon would enter the law school, while Ralph would follow in his father’s footsteps and study medicine. After leaving the professor, Leon was making his way toward home when he heard footsteps hurriedly approaching. In a moment his name was called, and turning he beheld Olga Mitchell running swiftly toward him.

“ Oh, Leon, wait just a minute, I can’t run another step ! ”

The child approaching—for child she appeared to be, though in reality nearly sixteen—looked as though she might have just stepped out from some picture, her cheeks as rosy as the March

wind could make them, laughing eyes, and golden brown curls—in truth, it was a sweet face, and fair withal to look upon. So thought Leon Thorpe as he listened to the half-gasped, half-whispered words, as she tried to talk and at the same time recover her breath.

“Mother—wants—to know—if you—can bring over the dresses—early this evening, so that we can get them in perfect readiness for to-morrow?”

“With pleasure, Olga, by seven-thirty if possible, provided that is not too early, and might I stay a very little while?”

“Certainly you may. Just think of it, we’re going to the city as soon as we can get ready after to-morrow, for a visit before father and mother go to Europe, then you’ll be off for college in the fall, and I’m going to boarding-school. Oh, it’ll be ever and ever so long before I see you again. Four years is an awful long time.”

“But, just think, Olga, the sooner I go the sooner I shall be back, and I’ve got to make every term tell, then when I graduate from law-school I shall look you up, and all will be as merry as”—he whistled the rest while his brown eyes twinkled merrily and glanced slyly into the blue ones beside him. The blue eyes drooped as

their owner fixed them upon the scarlet bow which adorned the end of her muff. Her cheeks were very, very rosy now and the full lips trembled just a little as she said, "It's a long time—four years,—and so much might happen."

"Yes, true, it might ; but I shall be home on vacations, and you shall come to all the Commencement exercises, and the promenades, if you like, he added slowly, his brow clouding at the thought of letting his little girl dance with any of the college boys. He didn't quite relish the idea.

"No, come to think of it, Olga, we'll leave out the promenades, if you don't mind ; and would you just as soon promise me that you won't dance round dances with any other fellow but me? Somehow, I can't bear to think that you will."

Olga laughed a little rippling laugh ; she was vastly amused at the sedate manner of her companion.

"Why, Leon Thorpe, you great foolish fellow, not dance round dances with any one but you when I don't know even the first step in dancing—I never danced in my life," and again she laughed merrily.

"Oh, but you'll learn at boarding-school—it's

one of the fine arts, you know ; and you'll have to learn that along with all the other sense and nonsense."

"And pray, what nonsense will they not be teaching you at college, at the same time, Mr. Leon ?" she sarcastically inquired.

"Oh, I shall be a humdrum bookworm every day I am there, because, you know, I've a great deal to learn to be a lawyer."

"Just think of it, Lawyer Thorpe ! my, how dignified it makes me feel to have for an escort a judge in embryo !"

"Now, seriously, Olga, will you promise ?"

"Yes, yes, Mr. Prim, of course I'll promise. Let me see, I promise not to dance round dances ; something I don't know how to do, and never expect to know how to do ; with any one excepting you. Is that what I'm expected to say ?" He felt she was laughing at him, but he had her promise, and he could stand a good deal from Olga.

He changed the subject very abruptly. "It's nearly five o'clock, little girl, but supposing we get our skates and have a little while on the ice before tea-time ?"

"That will be just lovely. We can't stay long,

so to facilitate matters I'll skip home after my skates while you go home and get yours; and don't forget about the dressés," she called back, for she was already several yards away.

"Be on the pond promptly at five," he replied, as the flying figure disappeared around the next corner. Leon started off on a lively run, and inside of five minutes had hung his books on a hook in the entry and was starting out again when he heard his mother's voice calling,

"Is that you, Leon?"

"Yes, mother."

"Why are you so late?"

"I remained after school with Professor Northrop to rehearse my valedictory. He thinks I shall be able to go through with it nicely, then won't you be proud of your boy?"

He had bounded up the stairs three steps at a time, and, as he uttered the last words, stood bowing before his mother in his most profound style.

"I am always proud of you, Leon," she replied, while tears of gratification dimmed her eyes; and she affectionately kissed the happy glowing face which bent toward hers.

He started to go and she again arrested him with the question,

“Where to now? It is nearly five o’clock.”

“Oh, the ice on the pond is fine, and Olga and I are going for a little skate before tea. I think there is a storm brewing and I guess this will be about the last of the skating. I’ll be back by tea-time.”

“Very well, be careful; you know I am so afraid of the ice.”

“Good-bye, little mother, never fear. By the way, will Mrs. Mitchell’s dresses be ready for me to take over by half-past seven?”

“Yes, all will be ready.”

“Good-bye.”

And Mrs. Thorpe heard him bounding down the steps while a smile crossed her features as she thought of her handsome, brown-haired boy just blossoming into manhood, a son of whom any mother might well be proud. Olga was on the pond before Leon, and had taken a turn about with Ralph Strong by the time he arrived. Already the ice was melting at the edge of the pond, making it necessary to cross in a boat from the shore to the island of ice. Near one end of the island a bonfire had been made from a load of branches which the boys had brought, and there in the ruddy glow the young folks came to warm

themselves ; then, when the spirit moved, were off in a trice to race, or cut their names, or describe circles, or to perform a dozen other variations of the delightful pastime of skating. For nearly an hour Olga and Leon enjoyed themselves, and then came the thought that it was nearing tea-time, and I assure you no one knows better than a school-boy when meal-time is approaching.

Returning from a trip to the further end of the pond, Olga and Leon wheeled up to the fire to enjoy the warmth while waiting for the boat to return, as a load of boys had been ferried over to the shore. At the same instant Ralph Strong who was standing with his back toward them, started away from the bonfire for a last trip around the pond. The boys' skates locked—there was a dull thud—and Leon lay on the ice still and pale as death. In an instant every skater had rushed to the side of the senseless form.

“For heaven's sake, boys, disperse, the ice is bending.”

It was the stern voice of Doctor Strong shouting to them from the shore. They started back in alarm, and only a few were left about the inanimate form which gentle hands lifted into the boat and carried ashore. Under the Doctor's

directions a stretcher was improvised, and on it Leon was carried to the doctor's office. By the use of restoratives he was brought to a state of semi-consciousness, and then they tenderly bore him to his home. Olga needed caring for, too, poor child ! She was in a nervous chill, and Doctor Strong sent Ralph home with her in his carriage. As he lifted her out at the parsonage door, he said,

“Olga, you don't think I did it on purpose ?”

“No, Ralph, you couldn't, I know.” “Thank you. I shan't care now what any one says. It was purely an accident which I regret most sincerely.”

With a few words of explanation to Dr. and Mrs. Mitchell, he left her in their charge and returned to his father's office. Doctor Strong had gone home with Leon, and on his return found Ralph in waiting. A more sorrowful, dejected countenance it would be difficult to imagine,

“Come, my boy,” said the doctor, “and tell me how it happened ;” and sitting there with his father beside the open fireplace, in a straightforward manner Ralph related to him the particulars of the accident ; and then, with his head bent in his hands, he wept tears of genuine grief.

“I am very sorry, Ralph. It will be almost a miracle if he recovers. The skull is fractured and

I fear a serious case of concussion of the brain. There is one chance in a thousand that he will weather it through. If he does he will have to wear a silver plate under his scalp. Poor boy, how his mother will grieve! She bore the news very calmly, though ; for she seemed to realize there was something to be done, and no time to be wasted in lamentations. I tell you, boy, that woman is a tower of strength. She certainly is a wonderful woman."

Ralph's tears had subsided, and after some moments of silence he said, "Father, I can't go to college till I know Leon is out of danger. His face would haunt me day and night."

"We will see, we will see ; though I hope for the best."

The morrow dawned in due course, and the class graduation exercises, were held, but there seemed to be a pall hanging over the whole school. He who was to have carried off the honors lay on his couch in a stupor with the death-angel hovering very near to him, while in and out and about the house mechanically moved a little woman whose peaceful face showed that her trust lay in the Omnipotent and whose faith was exceeding strong.

CHAPTER VIII.

SHIPWRECKED.

“ And the sea is wide, and the pitiless tide
Bears on its bosom away, away,
Beauty and youth in relentless ruth
To its dark abyss for aye, for aye.”



HE spring days began to lengthen, cow-slips started up in the brook, and trillium nodded its crimson blossoms in the shadow of the forest trees.

Houstonias whitened the hillsides, and violets lent their fragrance to the balmy May air. It did not seem at all as if the previous month had been one of showers, for but few had fallen, and those had been very warm and mild. The patient at the Alden Cottage was slowly improving, thanks to Doctor Strong's unceasing attention, and the untiring watchfulness of Mrs. Thorpe. The doctor drove daily to the cottage, and occasionally Ralph or Olga were allowed to see Leon for a very few moments at a time, but neither visiting nor much conversation was allowed,

for rest and quiet were now putting in their work, and were doing more for the patient than medicine.

Leon was now able to sit in a reclining chair, and often Ralph would wheel him out on the wide veranda which extended around three sides of the house. Frequently when Olga brought work for Mrs. Thorpe, she would also bring for Leon a choice bouquet, just stopping long enough to give a few pleasant words of greeting and encouragement to the pale-faced young man whom it seemed must now indeed give up all hope of ever undertaking a college course. The bright spring days sped on, and still Leon's condition remained about the same. He lacked vitality, so Dr. Strong said ; and the well-practiced physician racked his brain to discover some idea, which could be made of benefit to him. One early May evening Ralph sat in his father's office reading a New Haven paper. The doctor apparently was deep in the study of a ponderous medical work, but suddenly closing the volume he said, " Ralph my boy, glance through the shipping news. What vessels sail within a week ? " A list of a dozen or more schooners and brigs was read, but none would sail before the middle of May. " Don't you see the

schooner *Ivernia*; Captain Perkins, I believe?" "Ah! here it is in the list of yesterday's arrivals, with a cargo of coal from Norfolk. Then she will be sailing in two weeks from now. That is the one I have been thinking of. I fear Leon will never amount to anything unless he has an entire change; and I think a sea voyage will do him good, brace up his system, strengthen his nerves, clear his brain, and bring back some of the vitality he lost last March. Captain Perkins and I were at school together; and if he is the same stamp of a man that he was of a boy, there is no doubt but that I can make quite satisfactory arrangements. Of course I shall shoulder every cent of expense."

For several moments Ralph sat gazing into and beyond the bright coal fire which burned in the open grate.

"Father?"

"Well, my son?"

"Would it be safe for Leon to go alone?"

"I think I could arrange it so it would be perfectly safe."

"Would it not be better for me to go to look after him? It need not cost you anything, father, I would gladly work my passage; but I

do want to do something toward helping forward his recovery."

"I rather desired you to stay at home in order to make further preparations for college. The term opens in September, you know?"

"But, father, I have no heart to put into study till I am sure Leon is going to come out all right. I never can go to college and make any sort of a student, unless Leon can go too, and carry out some of his cherished plans. I would gladly lose a year out of my life if I might make some amends for the suffering I have caused him;" and the large honest face looked imploringly up into Dr. Strong's.

"I will think of it, Ralph, and now we will go over and consult with Mrs. Thorpe. It is early enough—not yet eight."

They found the widow busy with her needle-work, Leon having already retired. Dr. Strong made known his errand, and said at the close, "don't think of expense, Mrs. Thorpe; for I feel it my duty to bring that boy back to you in his former well condition, if it is possible to do so." Tears filled the mother's eyes and silently dropped upon her work as she strove to regain her voice. Dr. Strong you are exceedingly kind and thought-

ful, and I prefer that you do exactly as you think best in the matter. As his physician and friend you know better than I whether he is able to stand the fatigue of the journey."

"I think it the most beneficial course that could be adopted. Perhaps it will please you to know that Ralph intends taking the trip with him, in order that he shall be made as comfortable in all ways as possible."

Mrs. Thorpe looked the thanks she could not speak. They arose to go, but Dr. Strong called back before closing the outer door behind him, "I shall look up Captain Perkins to-morrow, Mrs. Thorpe, and see what arrangements can be made." The next morning found the doctor in the Captain's office on long wharf. A notice on the door read that the captain would be back shortly ; so Doctor Strong took a seat and waited. It was years since he had been on long wharf. How the place had changed. Dock after dock had been built out into the sound, and ships, counting into the hundreds, could easily be accommodated with anchorage. All was hurry and bustle, as the stevedores loaded and unloaded sundry cargoes.

How we go on in our lives, year after year, little thinking of the changes going on about us,

until some happening causes us to pause and look around, and behold it is as though we had stepped into a strange city. Places we were carrying in our minds as green fields, burst upon our view like the work of genii, all transformed into parks, and avenues bordered with beautiful residences ; or else, quiet streets are given over to the rattling drays and street-car lines—familiar houses gone, and towering blocks of factories making a deafening hum and clatter : but we were too late for the transformation scene ; and now no more on memory's walls hang restful views of those pleasant places, for a thought of the old picture brings on the panorama which is a result of passing years.

Dr. Strong's soliloquy was brought to a close by the sound of heavy footsteps approaching, accompanied by a rich bass voice, singing to the air of *Nancy Lee*,

“Afloat on the staunch Ivernia, my lads,
Heave ho ! lads, ho ! heave ho, heave ho !”

At this juncture the captain opened the door and discovered the doctor awaiting his return.

Arising, the latter said, “You seem in pretty good spirits this morning, Captain, don't look

much like a fit subject for medical skill," at the same time handing him his card. "No, Doctor, no—let me see—seems as though your face was familiar—can't just place you though."

"Hardly thought you would. Suppose you've forgotten all about Professor Lovell's and little Jack Strong that you and Philip Snyder sent up the professor's favorite pear tree after pears one memorable night?"

"Ah, ha, well not quite! I can almost hear the professor saying, 'Look at them gently, boys.' And so you are little Jack Strong? Glad to renew your acquaintance, Jack; but you've grown considerable since then;" and such a grip and handshake as the captain gave the doctor would have made a less strong man wince. "So you dabble in medicines, do you, and I sail the tautest schooner afloat on the Sound. Aye, aye, she's a beauty, she is! Do you see her over there at her moorings? Black, green, and white striped hulk. We sail in two weeks, perhaps less if all goes well. Am getting her load off sooner than I expected; and hope to make the most of this pleasant spell in getting on a cargo of lumber. Most afraid it's a weather-breeder though."

"Then I am in good season! Have you two

bunks to let to a couple of passengers for the round trip?"

"Perhaps I can manage it; who wants to go?"

Then, in a few words, the doctor explained how matters stood; and it ended in the captain saying, "Well, I should be much pleased to have the boys take a trip with me. I intended taking my daughter Grace along, but she finally backed out. Reckon she'll be sorry now when she hears there's other company. She thought 'twould be rather dull music along with such an old fogey as I am. Children nowadays are queerer than they used to be, I'm thinking. Mine is, anyhow, I know. Well, send them along as early as possible; for we expect to be afloat as soon as we can get our load on."

In answer to further inquiries he said, "We shall be back in port by the last of June at the latest." At that point some one else claimed the captain's attention, and the doctor took his departure. Mrs. Thorpe was taken entirely by surprise when she learned that the boys must be in readiness to sail as soon as possible; but the brave little woman did not falter now when the health of her boy was at stake; so she made ready as far as lay in her power, and Dr. Strong supplied

the deficiencies. When Leon was informed of the plan he acquiesced most heartily; being glad of a chance to see a little of life on the ocean. Ralph was on his way to Mrs. Thorpe's, when he overtook Olga going to the post-office, and he then told her of their intended trip. She clapped her hands with delight. "I am so glad," she said, "for I haven't a doubt but that it will do him lots of good." That night Doctor Mitchell sent down to Mrs. Thorpe a steamer-chair and rug for Leon's use during the voyage.

The day after the boys boarded her, the *Ivernia* sailed out of the harbor, and past the break-water, and in a few hours had rounded Montauk Point, and was ploughing the blue waters of the Atlantic.

The second day out, Ralph was leaning against the railing, while Leon, wrapped in Doctor Mitchell's comfortable rug, sat enjoying his first full day on the ocean. It was a delightful morning, atmosphere clear, air bracing, sky flecked with billowy clouds, while before a northwest wind the taut little schooner sped lightly on toward her southern port.

The third day out dawned clear and bright, but as the day advanced the castle-clouds gathered apace, and a pink haze hung around the horizon.

The sea settled itself into even billows as though quietly signalling its resting forces. Up from the northwest rose the storm clouds, and as night drew on, the angry waves were lashing the crafts afloat, while a thick chilling rain-mantle spread itself over a sleeping world. Our boys were cozily ensconced in the cabin, enjoying a game of authors. As the night advanced the darkness grew intense. The wind blew a gale, while, with sails closely reefed, and every movable article fastened to the deck, the *Ivernia* fairly flew over the mountainous waves, now riding the foam-crested billows, and anon having her decks swept by the angry sea. No one thought of going to bed. There was too much excitement on board, for the storm promised the little vessel hard work, if she weathered it through. The boys were all excitement and could hardly attend to their game, for the Captain had forbidden their going on deck. "Land-lubbers hadn't legs that would stand under them during a heavy sea," he said, "and what was more, he'd rather have them get fattened up a little more before he sent them down to feed the fishes."

The boys obeyed the captain's orders much against their own wishes. Supper was served at

seven o'clock, and shortly after the captain went on deck. With his glass he scanned the horizon. Inky darkness prevailed, but about five miles away shone the green light on the port side of a vessel. This gave the captain no uneasiness as the *Ivernia*'s lights were burning, and must have been visible to people on board the other ship. As they rapidly approached her the flash-light was turned to show that a sailing vessel was near ; the steamer, for such it proved to be, kept on its way, never altering its course, and Captain Perkins began to fear there would be a collision. "Hard a port ! hard a port !" he shouted ; and like a race-horse the *Ivernia* started forward.

The next instant the steamer too plunged ahead, as if incensed at a possibility of losing her prey ; and, in a breath, the *Ivernia* struck her amidships tearing a great hole in her side. The schooner's bowsprit swept the steamer's deck and knocked the captain from the bridge. Then the vessel swung about until almost side by side, and for a fraction of a second there was the solemn hush of death. Then burst forth a chorus of agonizing human cries. On the great steamer's decks men and women darted hither and thither, and soon was heard thud after thud as they

jumped down upon the Ivernia's decks. All on board the schooner had rushed to the scene of horror. Alas! the Ivernia was wounded as badly as the steamer.

“To the boats, to the boats!” shouted Captain Perkins, whose face showed pale to the lips as he stood under the light of the binnacle lamp; and with a broad axe they cut away the fastenings of the long boat.

“Forward, men!” he shouted. It was a fight for life to keep back the interlopers. One by one the Ivernia's men dropped into their places. “Are you all there,” the captain shouted.

“All but Matt,” called back one of the seamen. “He ran aft when the vessel struck.”

A glance in that direction discovered him lying apparently dead on the deck. Kind-hearted Captain Perkins was at his side in an instant, feeling for his heart. Life was still there. Lifting him in his strong arms he staggered to the side of the vessel where the long boat lay, the crew almost crazy in their endeavors to keep off the strangers who nearly overturned the boat, in their attempts to save themselves.

“Dead!” whispered Leon as he saw the blanched face.

"Only stunned," said the captain; and then all held their breaths as they rowed away from the sinking vessels.

Some of the steamer's crew had secured the gang-plank. There were fourteen clinging to it. The long boat passed them, and the captain threw them a rope. The next instant he regretted it, for the half-crazy men attempted to make their way by it to the boat already full. His first thought was to keep them in tow until relief should possibly come. He shouted to them and threatened to cut the rope if one attempted to board the boat; and as he stood knife in hand, they knew he meant what he said, consequently no further attempts were made to reach the boat. Soon an extra heavy sea turned the frail raft bottom up and all went over with it. Seven caught the plank as the waves strove to carry it beyond their reach; then, with giant strength, regained a position upon it. A moment later another big wave washed over it, and but five were left. Poor creatures, still tenacious of life! They were in the water hanging on to the plank with their hands and arms, too exhausted to climb upon it. Their heads lay on the board and only for the convulsive tightening of their arms when

the sea washed over them, one would have thought they were dead. They grew unconscious, and as the relentless waves washed over them, one by one they slipped quietly off into eternity. One alone was left. A man with silvered hair, and face haggard to look upon. Stolid and stubborn he still clung to the raft.

“ Crowd a little closer, men,” said the captain, “ we’ll take this fellow aboard if we can.”

The sailors rested on their oars, the raft was drawn up alongside the boat; and the solitary voyager was helped aboard.

“ Thank God ! ” he huskily whispered as he grasped the captain’s hand.

On they kept on their silent course, while all about intense quiet reigned. Where at first was an endless chorus of screams and prayers for help, there was now only silence. The men seemed struck dumb. Occasionally a dead body would slip by in the cold water, face up, in the light of the moon, which scudded in and out from behind the fringes of the storm clouds. Behind rose the tall masts of the sunken vessels with a few dark forms clinging to the spars. They had stopped rowing and were drifting with the tide. Day was dawning and weary eyes were strained to catch

sight of a sail. Hope, fear and suspense, were stamped upon the faces of every one. About four in the morning an ocean steamer was sighted, and a flag of distress was raised. They were discovered, and soon the steamer was seen to alter her course, and then out there in that awful stillness, between the sky and the solemn deep, those shipwrecked sailors raised their voices in thanks to him who holds the ocean in the hollow of his hand. It was a solemn moment, never to be forgotten, when those storm-tossed men sent swelling over the rolling waves the grand old doxology we all know and love so well. And then the rescuers arrived. All were taken on board,—yes, even poor stunned Matt who had all those hours lain unconscious in the bottom of the boat. Ralph trembled with apprehension of harm coming to Leon by this seemingly untimely accident, but hastened to secure the aid of the ship's physician who took charge of the invalid. The next day Leon was obliged to remain in his berth, but toward night begged of Ralph to go on deck and find out what he could of their surroundings. They were on board the *Ocean Queen*, for all the articles in their state-room were marked with that name. The doctor had answered, when asked

whither they were bound, "For the West Indies." Leaving Leon comfortably asleep, Ralph started on a tour of inspection, in order to gain further information. On reaching the deck his eyes at once alighted on an imposing figure. It was a tall, squarely-built man, not much over fifty; though his hair and beard would tell of a greater weight of years. Wrapped in a large gray shawl, and with a glazed cap settled on his head, he stood, glass in hand, looking off over the broad expanse of waves gilded by the setting sun. Clouds like molten gold hung in the west, while between them and the reflected gold of the ocean, up into the sky shot great shafts of hazy light. A dark bank of clouds spread all through the eastern sky, and far into the zenith; and then like a dissolving view, a glorious rainbow stood out predominant in gold, a golden bow upon a purple curtain of cloud. The effect was sublime, and our wrecked friends gladly grasped the thought that the future might promise brighter than the past. As the bright glory faded, and the rainbow disappeared, Ralph approached the strange gentleman, but scarcely recognized in him the haggard gray-locked man whom he had seen rescued from the raft early that morning. Indeed, it seemed as

though an interminable period had elapsed since then. So much can be crowded into a little space of time, that it makes that time appear longer than years with lesser happenings.

“Can you tell me what port we are bound for?” was Ralph’s query, as he paused beside the strange gentleman.

“Then you are a companion in misery?”

“Yes, the *Ivernia* was pretty badly shattered.”

“The *Ivernia*? H’m! I hold stock in her. That means a trip to New Haven. Where is your captain?”

“Below, sir, I think. I haven’t seen him since morning. In fact I have only just left my friend for a few moments in order to ascertain our whereabouts. He is an invalid, and pretty well shocked by the collision.”

“I understand our destination is Nassau, New Providence; one of the Bahamas. A thoroughly delightful place.”

“Then you have been there?”

“Oh, yes, my business frequently takes me there; though just now I would much prefer going in an opposite direction.”

Placing his hand in an inside pocket, he drew out a water-stained card.

“That much survives the wreck,” he said with a half smile.

“Was there any one belonging to you on board the steamer?” said Ralph, as he read on the slip of bristol board, Reginald Dean, Attorney at Law, New York.

“No one but myself,” came the answer in a saddened tone.

“Is it possible you are the Lawyer Dean whom my father so much admires? I wonder if it was you who so successfully handled the Vandercroft lawsuit some ten years ago?”

“I am the man.”

“My father, Dr. John Strong, often refers to you. He was one of the heirs, if you remember.” And this was but the beginning of a lasting friendship which sprang up between two noble natures. Was it by accident they had come together; or rather a part of the plan of the Omnipotent?

“How soon do you think we shall reach Nassau?” was the next commonplace offered by Ralph. It was a little harder to converse with this man now Ralph had found out who he was. He was ready to sit at his feet and learn.

“Probably in about two days. We were off

Hatteras at the time of the wreck. Look here—do you see that line to the southeast?" at the same time handing the glass to Ralph.

"I do."

"That is Abaco Island. Before long we shall be able to discern the light-house and trees on the land. I have already observed some of Mother Carey's chickens chasing us astern ; and see, those are dolphins racing about our bow. We may be in Nassau early day after to-morrow. It is a most delightful place."

"I have never heard of the place beyond studying a little about it at school "

"It is by far the cleanest city in the world, and a great resort for invalids ; though by no means will you find the people all invalids."

"Indeed ! Then perhaps this unexpected trip is a providential one for my friend. By the way, how often do steamers sail for New York?"

"Every four weeks in summer, and every two weeks in winter ; though a steamer goes to Florida twice a week. In that way one can communicate with his friends frequently."

"How is the climate during the summer months?"

"Almost too warm to stay long at this season,

though the thermometer averages only 86 degrees throughout the summer."

"Then it will perhaps do Leon more good than harm."

"May I ask who is this friend over whom you seem to have so much care?"

"Oh, it is a class-mate of mine. I am in a measure to blame that he is an invalid; so I am trying to help my father make a well boy of him." Then Ralph told Mr. Dean of the accident on the ice. In conclusion he said, "I only hope this unlucky mishap will not do him harm."

"Do not say unlucky, my lad; for it may result in being the most fortunate turn things could have taken. Such an accident is a mere trifle, when compared with the troubles which come into some people's lives;" and with a heavy sigh Mr. Dean turned his face away to the northward. Ralph went below and finding Leon yet sleeping, procured ink and paper, and began a letter home. He had written but a few lines when the sleeper stirred uneasily and was soon awake. It did not take long for Ralph to give a brief account of his visit on deck.

CHAPTER IX.

TWO SURPRISES.

“In life’s earnest conquest they only prevail,
Who daily march onward and never say fail.”



CAPTAIN PERKINS also had made the acquaintance of Mr. Dean, and the quartette held frequent interesting interviews. They stood in a group on deck when the pilot came aboard soon after day-break on the day but one following the foregoing conversation. Their first view of Nassau was indeed a treat for the boys with eyes weary of watching the sea. The harbor a sheet of sparkling green lying between the steamer and that isle of June, was a decided change from the deep blue waves over which the steamer had been riding. But the city with its waving palms, bananas, low smooth houses, white streets, and multitudinous swarthy faces, was a strange sight to two New England lads. As they landed at

the wharf, it seemed as if something new met them at every turn. Loads of sponges, cargoes of fish, melons, fruits and vegetables strange to northern eyes. Black men and women carrying burdens upon their heads, and here and there white people dressed in duck goods and summer silks. Mr. Dean guided them to the Royal Victoria Hotel, and helped them to feel at home. The day following their arrival, while out on a tour of inspection, the boys discovered a native pounding a soft spot into a rock with a crow-bar.

"Good-morning, my friend, what are you about," inquired Ralph.

"Mornin', sah; on'y jest plantin' a rose-tree."

"What, in that rock?"

"Yes, sah, tings grows dat way heah, sah;" and the fellow sat down to rest inviting conversation.

"You don't mean all things are planted this way," said Leon.

"Sartin shuah, dey grows wild too, outen de stone walls, sah."

"Then this must be a peculiar stone;" and Leon stooped and picked up a piece.

"Limestone, sah. De whole island is made of

it, so are de houses. De watah filters through it, dat makes tings grow, sah."

They came across one thing after another to arouse wonder and delight, until the boys wished that the doctor and Mrs. Thorpe were there, too; for then their happiness would have been complete. It would be three days before the Florida steamer would sail again, so the boys contented themselves with seeing the sights, doing the city, and visiting near-by points of interest. The day before the steamer sailed, Ralph spent every spare moment he could muster, as his letter will testify, in going into rhapsodies over the beauties of the place they had reached after the terrors of the wreck. He ended with a pressing invitation to his father to bring Mrs. Thorpe down and see if Nassau wasn't about as near a paradise as could be on earth. The ship's doctor had ordered rest and quiet for Leon, so to return home at once was out of the question; and if one place more than another was suited to invalids it surely was in this pure air, and amid the beautiful sights of this wonderful island city. We shall have a better knowledge of the wonders of the place if we look over Dr. Strong's shoulder as he eagerly reads the letter which he has so hastily opened.

The papers had contained rumors of the wreck, but nothing definite ; so Ralph's letter was relief from a fearful suspense.

“DEAR FATHER,

“We are safe”—“Thank God,” said Doctor Strong, and he hastened to Mrs. Thorpe's cottage before he read another word.

He repeated the words, “They are safe,” as he entered the cottage door.

“God is ever ready to answer prayer, Doctor Strong. I felt he would not send more than I could bear. Where are they, and what of them?” And then they sat down in the bright glow of the setting sun, and the doctor read aloud the letter.

“NASSAU, N. P., June ——, 188—.

“DEAR FATHER, AND MRS. THORPE,

“We are safe here in Nassau, where the steamer which picked us up was bound. Leon is brightening up wonderfully. Either the shock of the wreck, or the delightfulness of this climate has worked a decided change in him. You will both be pleased to see how well he is getting on. Of course, before this, you have read accounts of the wreck. It will

fill a book to go into all the particulars. Only one passenger that we know of was saved from the steamer which struck us. He is a splendid man, and you will be glad we have become acquainted with him, I know. I enclose his card which he gave me. He is the identical Vandercroft lawyer. Won't you be glad to see him? He has to go to New Haven on business; he owned stock in the Ivernia, it seems. This affair seems to be working out just like a story, though as the saying goes, truth is stranger than fiction, and it surely seems so. Mr. Dean took us to the Royal Victoria Hotel—the finest in the place. He has been here before and has helped us to have a very pleasant time. Captain Perkins is here also, and does everything he can to make it pleasant for us. When I get home I will tell you how bravely he went back and rescued one of his crew—a man who has sailed with him for some years. His head is hurt, so that his mind seems partly gone, but he is all right otherwise.

“Captain Perkins says he will never see him want. Matt follows us around like a faithful animal. He seems to know we are his friends, poor fellow! He is large and well-built, and will be able to work again, but he doesn't seem to

remember a thing that has happened. I feel so sorry for him. I wonder if you couldn't set him at work around home. He'll do anything you tell him to. I know Captain Perkins would be delighted if you would, but I'm sure he wouldn't think of asking such a favor.

"I tell you, father, this is a wonderful place. A sort of Paradise on earth. I never imagined there could be such lovely place. The average temperature is only 74. I am sitting on the veranda at our hotel enjoying the delightful sea-breeze as I write. All around us stretches the ocean, dotted with white-sailed boats, which, as well as a little steam-tug, make short excursions to the near or distant islands of this Bahama group. You would never tire of looking at the sea. A long narrow green island, like a strip of velvet, runs along our front, separating the ocean proper from us, and forming this quiet beautiful harbor, and you would hardly believe it if I should tell you how many shades of color the water takes on. You should see the wonderful colored fishes which are brought to the hotel every day; some are mottled like the shell of a tortoise, some are a bright indigo, others are striped with canary yellow, and others are all over a bright red.

“ The air here is perfectly restful, and the little city with its coral houses, creamy-yellow and golden-brown, with the many-gabled red roofs without chimneys is a pretty sight. A girl would go into ecstasies over it. Through the waving boughs of the cocoanut trees, I watch the water gleaming clear as crystal, but of a lovely turquoise blue, then beyond is a strip of emerald, and farther away the dark blue of the horizon, while everywhere are white sails. In the channel are half-submerged wrecks, relics of the time when wrecking was a profession around here. We have been in the sea-gardens, where with a sea-glass one can look down to the bottom and see the lovely ferns and lilies and sponges and coral and colored fishes, and I don't know what not. With a glass you can see objects at a depth of forty feet. Last night we went to the lake of fire at Waterloo. We stood on the bank, and it looked like an ordinary lake, but the instant we pushed off and dipped our oars it seemed to burst into flame. Every drop from the blades was like silver. It certainly is the most wonderful sight I ever saw. The bishop's yacht will be here one of these days, they say. It is a sort of chapel on board a boat. There are pews and a pulpit.

When the bell tolls the people know it is church time. Before many days we are going to Grants-town to see the sights there. It is a town of three thousand inhabitants, all colored ; and they grow pineapples, bananas and cocoanuts around their houses. The caves, and the Queen's staircase are other places we expect to visit. The rainy reason will soon be here, and we shall have to be making tracks for home, I suppose ; but I tell you, there's a great change in Leon. Tell Olga and Nellie we'll bring them each a string of beads. Don't forget to send us some money. Love to you and Leon's mother.

“ RALPH and LEON.”

In Dr. Strong's answer to Ralph he said, “ Tell Captain Perkins not to dispose of his man till he has seen me ;” and Ralph knew that business was settled.

“ Mrs. Thorpe ;” and Doctor Strong sat back in his chair, an intensely thoughtful expression settling over his large honest face. “ Mrs. Thorpe,” he reiterated, “ Ralph needs a mother, and Leon needs a father, are you willing to be a mother to my motherless boy ? ”

Then, without moving a muscle, he sat quietly awaiting her answer.

"I fear, Doctor Strong, that your generosity is getting the better of you."

"It is you who will be acting the generous part. Mrs. Thorpe, I respect you in the highest degree, and Leon I already love. My home needs not a housekeeper, but a homekeeper—a mother; and I know of no woman to whom I could more conscientiously pledge my heart and life, and the love of my son."

"I accept your offer, Dr. Strong, and will endeavor to make your home a happy one." It was a matter-of-fact wooing, of the most sensible sort. When Ralph and Leon reached home, they found this surprise in store for them, but, as the parents had anticipated, both boys were equally well pleased. Captain Perkins brought Matt with him, and Dr. Strong took him as an experiment. He proved himself worthy of his hire. The present was well remembered, but the past was a blank; yet he looked forward to the future as being alive with possibilities. He was more eager than a school-boy to learn his lessons, and made quite rapid progress under his two tutors, Ralph and Leon. Matt soon proved himself so trusty

and faithful, that the doctor began to wonder how he had ever gotten along without him. The boys were not of much use, as both were preparing for college.

The morning after the wedding, Sabra Denton came hastily into Mrs. Pritchard's by the back door. Sabra seemed in an extra twitter this particular morning. She was just bubbling over with some delicious draught of news; and was only waiting for Mrs. Pritchard to ask as usual,

“Well, Sabra, what on airth is up now?”

“Hain’t you heard the news, Mis’ Pritchard? Hain’t you expected it right along? I expected it, and yet I didn’t. I’m a leetle bit surprised some ways, and some I ain’t.”

“Well, Sabra, supposin’ you begin at the beginnin’, and tell me what you’re talkin’ about.”

“Land to goodness! Air you deaf, dumb and blind, Mis’ Pritchard? That old dolt of a Doctor Strong, that I wouldn’t hev to our old cat Bije, got married—married I say—last night to our proud widder, Lady Thorpe! There! you’ve got it straight! Would you a-thought it? Was you expectin’ it?”

“To tell the truth, Sabra, I hain’t thought much about it. I have noticed that he took an

uncommon interest in her boy, and I've seen him goin' back and forward there considerable, but I most thought they was too old for such nonsense, but then, I allus did say that you never can tell by the looks of a toad how far it's a-going to jump."

" And is that all you've got to say about it, Mis' Pritchard? Why, it clean took my breath away! It beats all I ever heard in the known world! Everybody knows she's thought that doctor was a little god on wheels, ever sense he took so much notice of Leon after he got hurt on the ice. I kinder thought all that palaver wasn't fer nothin', and I told Geoff so. Sez I, 'You'll see somethin' come out of it yet.'

" ' May be,' sez Geoff.

" Hum, may bees don't fly 'cept in May,' sez I."

" Hev you ever seen 'em out together, Sabra?"

" No, can't say as I have, though I've seen his carriage standin' there pretty often, and for a good long while at a time, too. I shouldn't a thought she'd a-liked the looks of that. I shouldn't, I know. I'll bet there'll be music there yet. Where there's mixt lots of children there allus is a breeze."

"I wonder if she'll go to the doctor's right away?"

"Oh, yes, there ain't no doubt of that, fer there warn't no light in Mis' Thorpe's house last night when I came home after takin' Mis' Mitchell's butter over. She warn't to hum, so I s'pose I'll have ter go again. Probably she was out to the weddin' too."

"I wonder what she wore and where they was married?"

"Married to hum, of course, in her brown silk, or a new one just like it. We can tell better if she walks out in it a Sunday."

"S'pose now the Alden Cottage'll be fer rent. Wonder who'll get it next?"

"I s'pose she'll keep a girl?"

"Well, I don't believe she's strong enough to take care of three men and that great house. Bet she'll have a picnic straightenin' it out, for there hain't been no woman there, only hired help, in a good many years."

"Wonder how the boys'll take it?"

"Guess there'll be some hifalutin'; fer when boys get ter be as big as they be they're not a-goin' to stand many innovations."

"Laws, Geoff's young 'uns was hard enough ter

get along with, and they was little ; but then I was their mother's sister, and could stand more from 'em than most folks could, perhaps. Well, it'll come out sooner or later, sech affairs allus dus."

" You seem to hev figgered it all out, Sabra. Hain't left much fer me to do."

" Well, own up you air beat, Mis' Pritchard ; did you really expect it ? "

" Don't be cut up, Sabra, but didn't you have a little weakness there yourself once ? "

" Land o' goodness, no ! I hain't no time fer such stuff and nonsense. Didn't I just tell you I wouldn't have him to doctor the cat ? Oh, no, I 'ain't lookin' arfter no man. They're considerable bother, I don't know what Geoff would do either. He sets a sight o' store by me, Geoff does. I've allus been a mother to his children. Mis' Pritchard, I want to ask your advice about a little matter of business. When Geoff heard of Dr. Strong and Miss Thorpe, what do you suppose he said ? "

" I don't know, I'm sure ! what did he say ? "

" Well, he said, sez he, Geoff did—— "

" Why, what's the matter, Sabra, you ain't goin' to have a fit air you ? Yer face is es red es a beet and yer tremblin'."

" No, I ain't goin' to have no fit, I guess I'm

goin' to have a husband. Guess I've as good a right to get one as Widder Thorpe."

"Why, what are you gettin' at, Sabra?"

"I came to ask your advice. I thought I'd see if you'd make strange about the doctor and Mis' Thorpe before I told you. Geoff sez, sez he, 'Well, Sabra, can't we get jined too? Then we'll all be a nine days' wonder together.' You don't think there's no wrong in marryin' my sister's husband, do you? I'm gettin' along in years, and if I'm ever a-goin' to git any one ter lean on, I'd better be about gittin' 'em, sez I."

"Well, well, Sabra, now you have clean took my breath away; but I'll tell you the honest truth, I've often and often wondered why you and Geoffrey didn't get married, fer you seem to get along so nicely together, allus."

"Thank ye, Mis' Pritchard, said Sabra, smiling and rising. "You'll probably see both couple of us walkin' out next Sunday. We shall make short work of it. We're too old to be gittin' up outfits and sech."

"Say, Sabra, sit down a minute. I hear Deacon Argyle is goin' to send that little Harum-Scarum to a real boardin'-school. Florence is on pins to go, too."

"That Mitchell girl is a-goin'. Her folks is goin' to Europe, so I have heard. You know it's fashionable now for parsons to take trips to Europe. Great note, I think, for folks to go gadding around the world and a chit of a girl like that let loose in a boarding-school. They git up to awful sights of mischief, when they're left like that. Expect something will come of it sooner or later."

"Deacon and Mis' Argyle set great store by that black-eyed young 'un of theirn. I'd take some of the spunk out of her, if I had a day's dealin's with her. The little minx hain't treated me decent sence the time it got out and noised around that she was adopted. Dunno's it's my fault, that she don't know who she b'longs to."

"Well, I must be goin'. Do you think you'll be lettin' Florence go to boardin'-school, Mis' Pritchard? She's as likely a girl as either of them."

"Well, I dunno, hardly," said Mrs. Pritchard, as she dried her hands on the roller towel, I guess the schoolin' she'll get here 'll be about all we can afford to give her. There ain't no use in giving her too hifalutin' notions."

"We ain't goin' to have no time, nor invitations, nor nothin', Mis' Pritchard; so you needn't feel slighted," called back Sabra, as she hurried off towards home.

CHAPTER X.

THE STOLEN RIDE.

“ Broken the golden cord ; severed the silken tie ;
Never again will the old days come.”



RARE Indian-summer day was ended. The evening shadows had fallen, and night crept on. A full moon sailed in a cloudless sky, while earth-dwellers breathed an atmosphere as balmy as that of the far away June-time. Such days always will steal in just before the cold and frost of winter begin their reign ; golden chalices of promise, bearing within them the scent of the roses and fresh-mown hay, such as will come again when summer returns.

In a select portion of the staid old City of Elms, at a point where its level, cleanly-swept streets bordered by towering elms lay at right angles, and the jingle of bells on two horse-car lines can be heard at all hours of the day, and as far into the night as the old Puritan city allows noisy

travel and traffic to hold sway, stands Mrs. Catlin's seminary. A modest-looking building, flat-roofed, and with a wide and comfortable veranda across the front of the house, its supports well garlanded with fragrant honeysuckle. The blossoms are now well-nigh gone, a few honeycups here and there hiding among the black-berried vines, almost apologizing for being out so late in the autumn. One of the front windows over the veranda is partly open. Behind the curtain sits some one slowly rocking. Some one comes along the brick-paved street. The step-sounds cease, but the brown grass bends under a young man's footsteps. He pauses an instant beneath the large elm which throws a weird shadow in the light of the moon. "Nothing venture, nothing have," he mutters, then with an agility which bespeaks gymnasium practice, he is among the lower branches of the tree! Hark! what means that owlish tu-whoo? It comes from the great elm. Slowly the curtain is drawn back, the blind opens and a white ball is thrown over into the tree. It is thrown back into the room, and then the telegraph line is completed.

If we watch closely we shall see by the moon-light a silver spot moving slowly from the tree to

the window where the blind stands just ajar. The white spot disappears between the slats and in a moment a handkerchief is tied on the blind. The message has been received and answered, and the occupant of the tree cautiously descends. It was a daring feat in the moonlight, but then, one will risk much for some cherished plan's sake, and no accounting for the daring of a sophomore. It was a pleasantly furnished apartment, half sitting-room, half bed-chamber. Near a small crimson-covered table sat a dark-haired girl poring over the dry pages of a geometry. The light from the student lamp fell on the book, her face being in the shadow. The fingers of one hand toyed a little nervously with the corners of the leaves as the owner knitted her brow, apparently in deep study. The other hand was almost buried in the mass of black ringlets that clustered around the sweet girlish face. Before the dressing-case stood another form, that of a fair-haired girl, by some two or more years the senior of the twain. A flush of excitement reddened the plump cheeks as she strove to smoothly coil the wealth of blonde hair, which, as if bewitched, almost defied her efforts. She accomplished the feat, and stood fluffing out the becoming bang, then said, in a

half-doubting tone, "So, Nell, I suppose you still think I'm awful." No answer came to this inquiry. In another moment the blonde was settling upon her head a jaunty cap, then whirling round, stood for an instant as she buttoned the snugly fitting jacket.

"Look up, Nell, I want to see your eyes, I can tell by them whether you are still displeased."

The dark eyes still rested on the book, but a voice sweetly grave, answered, "I should certainly not go, Olga, if I were you. There may be no harm in the going, only that it is against the rules of the school; but it makes me feel badly to see you so frequently in the company of Grace Perkins. Then it would make me despise myself to go sneaking off with the Damocles sword of Mrs. Catlin's wrath hanging over my head. However, you are older than I, and of course have the privilege of using your own judgment, which looks to me just now as though it were about to play you false."

"Listen, shades of Columbus! Why, Nell Argyle, Grace is the jolliest girl in the school. I wish you were going too, and then you'd be in love with her yourself. Now if I were a man—but alas, I am not,—am I shocking you utterly.

dear?" A ripple of silvery laughter as Nellie shook her head.

"Olga, you ape that girl even to her language."

"But you see, Grace says so many really 'cute things that they are actually catching, as it were."

Nellie raised her eyebrows, but said nothing.

"Of course Grace's mother takes student roomers so she gets all the latest from the college, but I verily believe the majority of them go there because Grace is so jolly."

The little French clock with its Moscow chime struck the half hour.

"Great Scott! is that half-past eight? I must skip. Grace will be tired of waiting, and it would be horridly mean to be left."

"When will you be back, Olga?"

"Oh, by ten, surely. You'll come down and let me in, won't you?—there's a dear. I'm going out by the west door now. Madame is entertaining company in the parlor, and Mistress Mary, quite contrary, is taking her after-tea constitutional in the library; so I'll get out as slick as a whistle." She tossed a kiss to Nellie, and tripped silently down the stairs.

Drop, drop, drop, went the tears on the open

page. Then down went the curly head, and the owner indulged in a good hard cry.

“Oh, Olga! Olga!” she sobbed; “you were my idol, but you are drifting away from me, you are being drawn into the whirlpool by that siren. We loved each other like sisters till that girl came between us; and she is winning you away from me; you, the only girl-friend I ever had. You are light-hearted and care-free, with an own father and mother, while I am only adopted. True, Mother and Father Argyle are good and kind to me, but my heart reaches out into the dark shut-away past after my own mother. My mother who cradled me in her arms, and who loved me because I was her own flesh and blood. It is kindred—those in whose veins flows blood akin to mine, it is they whom I long to see and know. Oh, will the future ever bring to me any one that is in reality an own blood relation! It is so hard to feel that one is entirely alone, not a soul in the universe, as far as I know, who really and truly belongs to me. And I love Olga so dearly, and ever since that Thanksgiving blizzard we have been like sisters; and now to go on feeling that undeserving girl is coming between us,—I cannot bear it; and the tears drowned the words as the

poor child wept bitterly. Olga had reached the sidewalk without encountering any one. She walked swiftly in the direction of the college, and soon reached Mrs. Perkins' door. Grace met her with a gushing greeting. "We were so afraid you couldn't come, my dear. The boys are out on the veranda enjoying a cigar. I won't ask you to take off your things, and I'll have mine on in a jiffy. Isn't it a glorious night?"

They stepped out on to the veranda, and were at once joined by two young men.

"Mr. Atherton; Mr. Delamere; Miss Mitchell."

Olga was thunderstruck. Grace's note had said that Leon Thorpe was to accompany them. She half-way stopped as the introduction was given, while Grace hurriedly whispered, "Don't say a word,—Leon couldn't come; backed out at the last minute; so Fred had to bring some one. You've met Clyde Delamere at the receptions, so there isn't any harm. He's lovely company," and Olga, without further remonstrance, though her heart misgave her, allowed herself to be helped into the carriage which was in waiting. The whip snapped, and they were all off for a moonlight drive. And Leon, sitting with Ralph, poring over the morrow's lesson, had no thought but

that Olga was engaged in the same occupation.

It was a perfect night,—one left over from late summer,—clear and mild. The full moon shone wierdly, beautifully, through the fine meshes of net-work made by the leafless elm branches. Back from the substantial looking fences stood the stately residences of New Haven's aristocracy. Doric pillars and Ionic carvings, statuary, and fountains of antique design whispering through the stillness, of the scholarly residents, and substantial foundations of the storied city of Elms. How Olga would have enjoyed it all had Leon only been there. On they rode, out where the curving river flashed back the silver of the moon-beams; on toward the sentinel rock over-looking the city, and the foam-capped waves in the harbor, where, at their moorings, floated ships from many foreign ports.

“Goodness! is this a Quaker meeting?” said Grace, breaking the unbearable silence.

“I was thinking of the beauties of the night,” said Olga.

“Then you enjoy moonlight rides, Miss Mitchell?” It was Clyde Delamere who spoke.

"Yes, under some circumstances," was her indefinite reply.

"Are they not propitious upon this particular occasion?"

"Not as much so as I might desire," came the truthful answer.

"Ah, here was something out of the ordinary. A girl who dared almost tell you she preferred another's company to yours. Refreshing, to say the least," so Delamere's thoughts ran on.

"Might I ask what more is necessary to complete your happiness?"

"The company of some one with whom I am so well acquainted that I may be privileged to remain silent, and yet not be considered rude. I do not care to talk much on such a night as this. So much beauty fills me with a solemn fullness which makes idle conversation detestably commonplace."

"A queer girl," thought Clyde Delamere.

"Fiddlesticks," said Grace, and Fred Atherton puckered up his lips and gave a prolonged whistle.

"Rats and nonsense," he confided to Grace; but Clyde had caught the contagion and quietly allowed Olga to enjoy the beauties of the night. And by that consideration he rose fifty per cent

in the estimation of Olga Mitchell. Battell Chapel chimes had rung the half after ten when Olga alighted at the corner, and lightly sped toward the little brown gate. With her heart in her mouth Olga stood at the west door awaiting the coming of Nellie. In a moment she heard the key turn in the lock, without a word she passed in and quietly up the stairs. Nellie was there almost as soon as she was. No remarks were ventured upon either side, but both began preparing to retire. "Why don't you ask me if I had a good time, Nell?" finally came in a quiet whisper as she bent, unbuttoning her shoes.

"Because I judge from your looks that it was hardly worth the daring."

"You're about right. Grace played me a mean trick."

"No more than I expected."

"Now, for pity's sake don't begin to preach, don't. It's enough to have this pinch in my side."

"What is that?"

"Why, every time I think what a goose I was to be led by her, there is a little pain in my side just as if my breath stopped for a few seconds. It is a dreadful disagreeable feeling and it makes me feel mean from head to foot."

"What has Grace done to make you so provoked, pray tell?"

"Why, when I got to her house, instead of Leon being there as I expected, and as she said in her note, who was it but Clyde Delamere; you know, that handsome black mustached fellow who always comes to the receptions. Of course I'd got there, and there was Grace and the boys and the carriage, and the night was perfect, and like a goose I went, when I ought to have turned right around and come straight back home. I didn't begin to enjoy myself; though the evening was perfect, and to cap the climax what do you think happened. That handsome puppy offered to kiss me, yes—he actually did offer to. This is how it was. We were almost at the corner coming home, and he slid his arm along the back of the seat and brought his face too near mine for comfort. Grace and Fred were having a delightfully confidential time on the front seat, and I don't suppose they would have been diverted by much short of a smashup. Well, his mustache actually brushed against my cheek, and in a tone I shall never forget, he actually said, 'What would you say if I should kiss you?' I actually thought I should faint

away, but I sat up as straight as possible, and said in the haughtiest tone I could command, ' You would not do it, you are too much of a gentleman.' "

" I am," he said, in such a manly tone that my respect for him went up ten per cent, but I tell you, I'm glad I'm home; and when I go skylarking again with Grace Perkins she'll know it."

" I'm not going to preach, dear; for I think you've had your lesson, but really I'm not in the least surprised. I haven't a particle of faith in Grace. In all probability he took you for her stamp, and I am under the impression that her lips are a common on which every donkey in college has the privilege of browsing. I intend to keep my lips with the bloom on them."

" Why, Nell, you talk like a woman instead of a girl. There must be a mistake in your age."

" No, I think not, for the crow's feet haven't begun to appear yet. I hope no harm will come of this escapade, but you'll have to be awfully careful. Do you think you shall continue his acquaintance? I'm afraid you'll be sorry if you do."

" I suppose that all depends. I like him for some things, and for some I don't."

Then for a moment two white-robed forms

knelt beside the couch, then a good-night kiss, and the children slept. How little they could know of the future! Not even in dreams were either troubled, and yet this night had been forged a link as strong as any in either of their life-chains. Ah, how little we know! and yet had we known—would we have done differently? We are all self-willed, headstrong, at times; and perhaps it is all in the pattern. The knots show only on the wrong side; and there are cross stitches and snarls, and broken ends and barren places; yet on the right side is a beautiful whole. Then we must not say, "I would have done thus or so," for we do not know. Then again there are the invisible lines,—those threads which are drawn by other people; and on account of these, to make our own pattern perfect, we must go in and out and about and around, that the tangles may always come on the wrong side.

CHAPTER XI.

C O N F I D E N C E S.

“Memories! fold them up,
Lay them sacredly by;
What avails it to dream of the past,
The future for you and I.”



FEW evenings after the stolen ride, Clyde Delamere went to Leon's room in search of a Greek Lexicon belonging to the college library.

“I say, Thorpe, do you know Olga Mitchell,” came the query from the depths of the ponderous volume.

“Why?” came the Yankee answer to the question.

“I believe she came from your place, did she not?”

“I have an acquaintance with the young lady in question. Why do you ask?”

“Oh, nothing, only she was in company with me the other evening.”

“Indeed?”

“Yes, I say, Thorpe, did you ever kiss her?”

“What impertinence!”

“Impertinence be hanged. I attempted it that evening.”

“How dare you!” and anger was visible in both tone and looks.

“Oh, you needn’t get mad about it. She represented it of course. I say, Thorpe, she’s an angel. I’d like a further acquaintance with her.”

“And you’ve come to me confessing, hoping I shall help you out?”

“Just so! I sent her some flowers the next morning, but she returned them without a word.”

Leon smiled.

“I’d like to become better acquainted with her. She seems much more sensible than ordinary girls.”

“How did you come to find that out?”

“Oh, Grace Perkins fixed that up for me. She knew I wanted to meet her, so she made out that you would be one of the party, and instead it was I—see? However, the little game wasn’t a success. I tried to treat her as I do the other girls,

and it didn't work, you see. Fix it up for me if you can, Thorpe; and I'll be your friend ever after. I'm deuced sorry I offended her, but confound it, I didn't think she'd care."

Leon's reply was a question. "Have you told her so?"

"No, hang it, of course not."

"I should."

"Would you, really?"

"I certainly should."

"How do you suppose she would take it?"

"Like the lady that she is."

"By George, I'll do it. Thank you, Thorpe."

"I'll be hanged if I don't believe he's interested there himself," Clyde mused as he hurried back through the rain to his room in South Middle. He was not a bad young man, only one of those foolish, jolly fellows whom all the dashing girls had made a great deal of, until his organ of self-esteem had been considerably enlarged.

By a singular coincidence, on the evening in question, Olga and Nellie sat by the register in their cosy room while the rain drearily beat against the side of the house, and fitful gusts sent the great elm's branches scratching against the clap-

boards. The light was well shaded, and the girls had settled themselves for a quiet chat; Nellie seated in a wonderfully comfortable easy rocker, her hands clasped over her dark unruly curls; while Olga half reclined on an Oriental divan.

"Ugh, such a moaning screeching wind is enough to give one the creeps. I wouldn't like to be crossing the ocean on a night like this." And Olga involuntarily drew about her shoulders a dainty soft-knit afghan.

"I'd love to be sitting by the fireplace in the old kitchen, with mother knitting, and father reading the news from the *Sentinel*." A long sigh followed this mournfully delivered speech. They were verging on homesickness.

Why is it that on such a night legions of old home-memories will keep marching through one's brain, inviting to combat the forces of the will which have kept in submission these sacred and loved associations? Ah, human nature is a strange and mighty sovereign who strives for mastery in the hearts of all earth-dwellers!

Then in a sadly subdued tone came the thought which at times took a strange hold upon light-hearted, sunny-tempered Olga. " Honestly and truly, Nell, I sometimes wonder if I am who I am.

Do you know, for years and years I have imagined I was adopted, and I have actually asked mother if it was so ; but she says I am her own, and that God gave me to her ; so I don't see but that it must be only an hallucination, and I try so hard not to think about it, but it will keep coming up in my mind."

" What a strange thought ! How came you ever to imagine such a thing ? "

" Oh, for ever since I can remember I have over and over again dreamed of a man's face. The dearest, kindest, and most tender face you could possibly imagine. Such beautiful dark eyes, very much like yours, Nell ; and now it's strange I never thought of it before, they are very similar in every way. But this face is such a pleasant and kind face for a man, and truly, Nell, sometimes I dream he kisses me, and I awake at once to find that it is only a dream."

" Perhaps it is the face of your future husband," said Nell, with a half sad smile. Olga's remark had stirred up all the old bitter feelings over which she had had many hard struggles.

" Oh, no, that couldn't be, for this seems so much older than I am, why, old enough, surely, to be my father. By the way, I had a letter from

mother this afternoon. She is coming home in June, and in October she is going to take me to Berlin, for a year or so of music : and I suppose that will finish my schooling. If I get a chance, I shall take a dip into painting, for I believe I care more for art than music. If I could only paint that face as I can see it, perhaps it wouldn't haunt me as it does."

"Where is your mother now?"

"In Glasgow. Father had business there, he always has when they go abroad. I verily believe he would like to live there. Wouldn't it be strange if it should come to pass that you and I should live on either side of the Atlantic?"

"I hope not, Olga, I shouldn't like to think you were going away off to live where I should never see you again."

"Oh that couldn't be, you must come to see me then, and perhaps I shall marry you off to a descendant of one of those Scotch barons that Deacon Argyle tells about. I don't know, though, as father could exist forever outside of New York City. I've often wondered how he came to stay in Westbridge as long as he did ; only of course I know it was for his health. Never mind, dearie, we've had some lovely times together, and its a

long time to next October ; but when I do get over there I'll write to you every week for sure, and you must write to me. I want to make a confession, Nell—do you think Leon cares very much about me ? ”

“ Is that your confession ? ”

“ Of course not ; but, truly, I imagine he doesn't, and I am actually beginning to observe a number of faults in him. I dare say he sees faults in me, too. He's a splendid fellow and all that ; but I think there are lots of girls he might like better than me. We are both too young to be settling such questions, I think, don't you ? ”

Nellie's mind reverted to the accident on the pond, and to several other incidents when Olga's first thought was of Leon ; but time works change.

“ I overheard a similar question discussed one day. The gist of the matter was this. The girl one would care for at seventeen would be out of the question at twenty ; and the one who was chosen at twenty would be looked upon as not at all suitable at twenty-five ; but that at the latter age one might rest assured they were making a proper choice.”

“ That must be why so many unhappy mar-

riages are made. The papers are full of accounts of girls and boys getting married. I cannot for the life of me see why girls can think of such things."

"There is certainly nothing manly or womanly in going off as if they were ashamed to have a decently conducted wedding—but we have wandered off to nonsense, for us."

"Well, I have no more idea of getting married than I have of taking a journey to the moon."

"It always seemed to me that there must be a sort of telegraphic system between the two who should be joined for life, and that each should know for a fact that he or she belongs to the other. I think it is a lovely thought that matches are made in heaven, and that if one truly interprets the telegrams, that the proper marriages will be made."

"Answer me truly, Nell, don't you think it foolish for girls of sixteen or under to become engaged?"

"I certainly do, Olga, and I would say eighteen or younger, and perhaps twenty. Girls do not know what their possibilities are for doing good in the world, or for accomplishing anything along given paths, until after they are of age. How do

you or I know but that God has meant us for instruments in His hands to do some special work, which only you or I may do ; and is it right for us to so bind ourselves, while we are yet children, as to interfere with something which later on we must come to know should have been our life-work?"

"How can you ever think such things out, Nell? I believe you are a born genius ; and don't for pity's sake go and spoil your future brilliant career by any foolish acts."

"You are inclined to jest, but, have I started on any sidetrack to your knowledge?"

"No, Nell, nor do I think there is any danger of it. You are too strong-minded, strong-willed, or whatever you choose to call it. It is only the weak ones, like poor me, who go jolting along over the rough places. There goes the bell! Lights out in two minutes. We must hurry or Mistress Prim will be on hand."

In another half hour quiet reigned in the place of confidences, and Olga and Nellie slept.

CHAPTER XII.

THE PICNIC AT ECHO LAKE.

“A quiet lake like a picture fair,
Lies at the foot of the purple hills ;
Where the dreamy sunshine lingers long,
And softly gleams on the silver rills.”



HE birds were up betimes twittering among the branches on one particular morning in early summer. Over the hills the sun was rising into a clear blue sky, while earth was all a-sparkle with glistening dew. As Nellie opened her window she was sprinkled with drops from the fragrant honeysuckle vines which clambered in a wild tangle up from the porch below. The clock hands pointed to the hour of four, but Nellie’s eyes were wide open, and sparkling as brightly as the beautiful landscape that lay before her, rising in ridges and settling in hollows. Through the undulating meadow-land wound Mile Brook, and over at the left was a piece of chestnut woods, while to the

right towered the church spire white and glistening against the bright fresh green of the fields and hills beyond. The robins sang and swayed in the branches of the old apple tree that stood farther along by the back door, and Nellie's heart was in full tune with the large golden-breasted fellow who saucily sat on a low branch and sang so lustily.

But as she descended to the herb-scented kitchen, a strange feeling came over her for an instant, almost as though the shadow of a passing bird had fallen upon her; so swiftly fleeting that she wondered if a bird had really flown by, then over her spirits settled a phantom-like presentiment that there was near at hand, lurking somewhere in the moments of the day, an undefinable something which would turn over a leaf in her life-story. It could not be because the girls were not coming, for had not her invitation been accepted, and was not this the morning when father Argyle was to meet them at the early train? She would shake off the uncanny feeling, and go about her duties with a heart as light as ever. The day's work was well on the way before Deacon Argyle started for the depot to meet the 7:55 train. In twenty minutes more the lunch-baskets stood on

the porch, and Nellie waited at the gate, momentarily expecting to see her father returning.

Almost before she was aware the girls were devouring her with kisses, while her fresh cambric gown received many wrinkles from sundry enthusiastic hugs, interspersed with expressions of admiration for Nellie's thoughtfulness.

"Just think of it," said Olga, "she's not only taken pity on us poor mortals destined to spend our summer vacation in that stuffy old seminary, and invited us to spend the day, but as many as can may stay a week."

Mrs. Argyle and Nellie served them with a light lunch, and then the deacon drove up with his lumber-box filled with straw, over which the girls spread shawls; then all clambered in and started off for a straw-ride. The girls were ecstatic in their exclamations, and well they might be. The City of Elms is a beautiful place; but beyond it among the green ridges of hills which lie to the north and east, and westward, are scenes and homelike places, which neither artist's pencil nor poet's pen, could picture in their full loveliness. Canopies of branches interlaced above the dusty roadway, fields of grain waving yellow and billowy under the breath of passing breezes; hills and

hollows overgrown with pink clover, white daisies, and yellow butter-cups; while the wild blackberry vines creep in a tangle about their growing places.

There is a break in a denseness of the woodland, a sound as of tinkling bells, then a glimmer of silver, and plashing of a shimmering waterfall, but they do not pause there. Exclamations of surprise and pleasure continue.

“Why, Nellie, why didn’t you tell us you lived in fairyland? We should have been here long ago if we had only known.” “No wonder she had things about as she wanted them at school, for she surely must have them here.” “Say, Nell, I’ll exchange homes with you if you’ll say the word:” and thus with pleasant bantering they reached the borders of Echo Lake. Its smooth waters gleamed like silver, and white and golden lilies floated on its bosom. Monarchs of the forest grew near its margin, and brakes and ferns bent over it. Here and there gleamed yellow dodder, and crimson cardinal flowers, beautiful things of a few days; while the moss-grown stones told of years of restfulness and solitude. ‘Mid scenes like these Nellie had been reared; and here she brought her girl-friends to spend a

few hours near to the heart of nature whom she loved.

Had you asked her which of all the various forms of nature was most lovely, she could not have told you; for she loved all, from the glint of sunlight through the dense foliage, to the tiny leaves and blossoms that nestled close to the bosom of old Mother Earth. She loved the mossy stones in the brook, and the sheltering arms of the old forest trees; yet withal, when among these friends, as she was wont to call them, there fell over her spirit a shadow of sadness, as though with all these beautiful surroundings there was something still lacking, a want in some recess of her nature which was not satisfied. And after all, are we not each and all conscious at times, that within us is a want unfilled, a something which the soul reaches out after and yet never finds? Is it not the most plausible theory imaginable, with the mind, heart and soul ever reaching forward after this desired yet unattainable something, that when the death-angel closes the doors of our earthly vision, another shall be opened on things divine, and that then we shall be satisfied?

And who shall say that it may not be this which

we have so much desired, yet could not realize, clothed as we were in our mortality, with apparently so much on earth to live for, not capable then of fully understanding that this life is but the beginning, and death only the guardian of the doorway through which we are allowed, one by one, to enter into the fuller life beyond. And in that beyond we shall live in the fulness of a divine satisfaction; our spirits dwelling in the heavenly form even as we had our life and being on earth below. Mysterious, and past finding out, are the ways of our Creator; but there rests not a shadow of a doubt but that beyond the grave "we shall be satisfied." Such views of grandeur as the one before us are well calculated to teach us that our earth knowledge is extremely limited; and as we gaze, our brain seems filled before we have realized a fraction of the sublimity of nature's God. Back a little way, where we left our girls in the bright summer sunshine, Deacon Argyle had deposited them bag and baggage, and had gone with the parting injunction, "You all be hereabouts in the neighborhood of four o'clock, for I'm goin' on to Beacon Falls, and I'll be back by then."

"Say, girls! You've often heard Nellie speak

of a cave or some such mysterious place near this Echo Lake. Is it too far to go before dinner? Notwithstanding that delightful lunch, I expect if it was very long to dinner-time I should die famished."

"How you talk?"

"How dare you?"

"Shame on you, Olga Mitchell," and sundry other exclamations came from the other girls, but Olga was proof against it.

"Pshaw! Nellie Argyle knows me; and I know there's something good in those baskets, now isn't there, Nell? Can't we just sample them?" The others held their breath and waited.

"It is rather a few steps over there, and the ride has given me an appetite, too;—hasn't it you, now own up, girls? All that are willing to own up just come along and help undo these fastenings;" and immediately there was a grand stampede for the baskets. In an incredibly short time the cloth was spread, the dishes had been tried in ever so many places until they would stand without tipping, and then the merry party dropped down around that tempting spread.

At a motion from Olga, every head was bowed while Nellie said grace. Then woe be unto the

chopped-ham sandwiches, and the cream-cakes, and the diluted contents of a small bottle, said contents proving to be lemon juice and sugar. Whipped-cream cake, and fresh-picked berries, disappeared in their turn, and then packing-up time came. There was enough left for a good lunch on their return; and after storing things in as small a space as possible, Nellie led the way toward the cave.

"What have you in that parcel, Nell?" queried one as she saw her carefully guarding an odd looking bundle.

"Oh, that is one of the most necessary articles we shall use on this expedition," she answered, and then many and varied were the surmises in regard to the mystery, as they termed it. The footpath was quite narrow, and apparently led off into the woods; but after walking some distance, a sudden turn brought them face to face with a huge rock. Then Nellie untied her mysterious parcel, and produced candles and matches.

"Is it dark?" gasped a faint-hearted member of the party.

"Oh-h-h! I don't dare go in," said another.

"I'll wait till you come back," said still another; and then;—

"We shall not come back this way," from Nellie, and Olga laughed, saying, "It's not, To go or not to go, that isn't the question,—there's no alternative;" therefore each took a lighted candle and bending beneath a tangle of vines entered through an opening in the rough gray stone.

The next instant a volley of "Ohs" sent the echoes sounding, where they could not tell; till they died away like the reverberations of distant music. They tried it again and stood entranced. Then, as the sensation of fear died out, they discovered what a beautiful place they were in. A chamber whose walls glistened like silver in the flickering candle-light. The floor was partly covered with mosses and lichens, while here and there were sparkling pools of water.

"Aren't you a bit afraid to go through here, Nell?" said one of the girls.

"Not a bit,—I've been here a good many times. I've been once alone," said brave Nell.

"But I'll venture you didn't come alone a second time."

"I must confess it seemed rather uncanny."

They clambered over a few small rocks, and there espied in the distance a ray of light. Another turn in the rocky recess and behold a flood of

light! They were on the border of the lake. They had been walking under the huge boulder, and the echo had come from over the lake. They breathed a sigh of relief when all were again in the sunshine and seated themselves for a few moments of rest, amusing themselves by throwing stones into the lake and watching the ripples.

"Do you see that hill-top over there," said Nellie, pointing backward, for she faced the lake. All turned to see a sugar-loaf mountain, the face of which had been blasted and worn away till the gray visage of the huge mountain seemed garlanded with the foliage which grew but a little way down from the crest of the rock.

"We can't go over there."

"It's too far."

"It must be five miles."

"Well, it is a good two miles from here to the top of it, but that isn't much when one is used to it. One doesn't mind footing it for five miles in the country, you know."

"We shall have to charge somebody for boots and shoes, I think," said one of them.

"Guess you'll have to, Kate, by the time you get back from there; for the summit of Lookout

Ledge is four hundred and fifty feet above the level of the sea."

"But come on, I'm in for all there is to be seen about here. Nellie has lived through it, and I guess we can."

With jest and song they filled the moments, and were at the foot of the mountain before they were aware of it, and began the gradual ascent. The path was rocky and perilously near the edge. Upon reaching the ledge and looking down, the river flowing at its base could be plainly followed in its course to the Sound. A village lay at the foot of the mountain. There stood the church, and the mill with its pond and waterfall. In the far distance beyond the rolling acres of grassy meadows was the blue sail-dotted Sound.

"We can almost see the foam in the wake of the ships."

"Hush!" said Nellie as she swung herself down on to a shelving ledge and sat there with her arm about the trunk of a small cedar which grew out from the face of the rock. What a position from which to view such a panorama as spread before her, east, west and south; a picture bounded only by the far horizon. "This is as near heaven as any place on earth can be. It is sublime!"

and her face told that she was drinking at the fountain of a deep and real pleasure.

Enjoy it, child; before long you will be a child no longer. Epochs are marked in other lives; they are in yours.

“Look! look!” called Olga, from her post some rods away. “Isn’t that a gypsy camp over there, where that smoke is rising? Come on, girls, and let us get our fortunes told. Won’t it be fun!” And she led in the descent, which was quickly accomplished.

“Oh, Nellie,” said one of the more timid ones, “can we ever find our way back?”

“Certainly,” said Nellie. “I’ve been whortleberrying over this region too many times to get lost.”

“It must be delightful to live out in the woods all through the summer time,” chimed in Olga.

“H’m,” said one, “I’ve no faith in their incantations and nonsense, and shall not waste my money on them.” As the bevy of girls approached the cluster of tents they exclaimed at the beauty of the travelling habitations, and went into ecstasies over a real gypsy-kettle suspended above a blazing wood fire. Several

women were seated about on the grass, while a number of dusky little children played about under the trees. Two young women, in gaudy attire, arose and approached our girls. The dark faces of the strangers, together with their gliding noiseless motion, caused the girls to pause, uncertain whether they wanted an interview with such treacherous-looking beings. One was gorgeous in pink ribbons, looped and bowed in her hair, and on her large-brimmed hat; while the other was resplendent in red, even to her shoes.

“Have your fortunes told, ladies? have your fortunes told?” said one.

“No, I guess not,” said Nellie. She began to feel as though they were treading on forbidden ground, in thus trying to look into the future.

“I will bring you luck, lady, just you cross my palm with silver, and let me bring you luck. You have never had your fortune told before by a gypsy?”

“No,” said Nellie.

“I am no common gypsy, lady; I tell you true. I am a seventh daughter, and I have great power. I will bring you luck, lady; just you cross my palm with silver.”

“No, no,” said Nellie. She felt as though a

charm was being thrown over her, and she must break away from it.

“Tell the others first and then I’ll see.”

“I will tell you a little, lady—now listen, there is something I must tell you for your good. There is a gentleman who has been paying a little attention to you, and I want to warn you against him.”

“Listen to the gypsy’s warning,” sang Olga, who stood near and overheard the words.

“Tell hers first,” and Nellie snatched her hand away.

Olga stepped up.

“I’m ready. What have you good in store for me? I don’t want to hear any of the bad. That comes fast enough without telegraphing ahead about it.”

“My lady with the angel face,” and the gypsy gave a low courtesy, and as Olga generously crossed her palm, the gypsy began her strange words.

“Ah, my lady, I can tell you many things you would like to know, and more you wouldn’t. You will not always live this side the water. I see a beautiful home far away. Poor little girl without the mother-love! All that heart can

desire save that—but it comes. That face which I see—”

“What of it?” said Olga with a start.

“You shall see it yet, my lady. There are some rough places to come, but there will be happiness at last.”

With that she dropped a low courtesy and turned to Nellie.

“Now, my lady, I will tell you that which is true if you only cross my palm. I see you have no faith, but I have just told your sister’s.”

“That is false, for I have no sister.”

“What! not that lady with the beautiful face?”

“No, only sisters as girls at school often claim to be.”

“She paid me generously,” continued the gypsy, “and I will tell you just a little.” She held Nellie’s hand firmly, and examined it with the closest scrutiny.

“My lady, you cannot deceive me. Marie knows the palms of gentlewomen too well. I tell you, the same blood as that of the fair lady flows in these veins, and the same kindly face bends over you. She wins the dark-haired man; but if you are wise it will not break your heart. Much

more I could tell you, but you have no faith. Hope on, for all things come to those who patient stand and wait. When the day of triumph comes, remember Marie."

The woman turned, and, with swift and silent steps, disappeared among the trees. Nellie was bewildered. What nonsense, had she been listening to? Was this the fulfilment of the morning's presentiment? It must be, but how strange that the woman should choose both Olga and her; and then, the weird unlikely things of which she had spoken. Nonsense! That was all it was, and she would try to think no more of it. But one cannot throw off in a moment such thoughts as were aroused by the gypsy's lore. It took some time to get back to their first quarters, and a merry hunt they had for the viands. Deacon Argyle was on hand at four P. M.; and the going down of the sun found our girls back at Primrose Bank, thoroughly tired out with their day's enjoyment. How restful and uplifting it was to sit in the deepening shadows, and listen to the insects chirping in the dew-laden grass; to breathe the fragrant incense from nodding lily-bells.

The lowing of the cattle in the fields, and the whistle of the farmer's boy coming back with his

pail from the milking; and the last few sweet notes of a bird's evening song, all harmonizing completely, even to the Katydids, carrying on their everlasting and never to be solved problem in the row of the maples in front of the house. Deacon Argyle sat on the stoop in his old-fashioned chair, watching the evening star go down in a halo of softly radiant opalescence. It was one of those nights one never forgets. Not remembered simply by the happenings of the day; but, in the quiet holy stillness, it seemed as if heaven came very near to earth, and one felt the benediction. Hearts opened to embrace the fulness of peace which seemed to pervade the whole atmosphere. We should give thanks for such moments. That night, in the quiet of her white bed-chamber, Nellie knelt by the window thinking deeply, and gazing out into the solemn quietness lighted by the full rising moon.

What a cool and sweetly refreshing breeze stirred the dark branches through which the moon-beams shimmered, softening the denseness of the shadows, and lifting hearts along their stairways of light, up to that beautiful home beyond the clouds. And a quiet stole over her spirit which had been racked since the afternoon, a full and

overflowing restfulness, in answer to an uplifted prayer that she might be forgiven for her foolishness in listening to the gypsy's words ; and that she might feel that forgiveness, by having those words obliterated from her memory. Conscience had whispered that it was unwise to listen ; but the words were imprinted on her brain. That is the penalty for sin. We may ask and receive forgiveness for a sin committed, or for a foolish act which has been done ; we may feel the assurance of forgiveness, but the trace of the sin is indelibly printed on our own inner sight, and the quiver comes around the heart-strings whenever we think of the foolish act. And yet, Nellie went to her bed forgiven for her weakness, while poor passion-tossed Olga, was wondering and racking her tired brain over the things which she imagined had been, or might yet be in store for her. Poor little girl ! Why did she not cast her burden on the great Burden Bearer ?

CHAPTER XIII.

THE DRAGON OF ARMADALE.

“ Then you came with oath and ring,
Wooing me as lovers woo;
And the gladness of the spring,
And the sunshine came with you.”



ISTY yellow butterflies dipped and skimmed over the closely shorn meadows; the hay-crops had been harvested, and the crickets and winged grasshoppers buzzed and whirred over the drying stubble. Over two years had gone by, bringing their varied changes. Many white-winged messages had flown back and forth over the ocean between Olga and Nellie. On this beautiful day in early September, when it seemed as though all the beauties of summer were combining, we find Nellie just a little uneasy in mind. She was sitting down by the waterside, where Tumbling Foam brook fell in misty spray over slippery gray stones and tufts of long grass which

grew in the crevices. It was not the plain little face which had been pressed against the pane that Thanksgiving-day several years before. The bloom and grace of womanhood were upon her ; the gray eyes wore a softened expression, as she gazed abstractedly away into the distances among the forest trees, until sight of all present was lost, and she saw scenes which fancy pictured to her inner view. The beautiful tones of the distances, the ambers and greens, and shadows formed no part of her vista, simply serving as a fitting background for the subject study which an artist would have been eager to transfer to canvass.

A crackling of branches overhead, brought her back to the present, and instantly a rosy flush overspread her features, then receding, left her quite pale. The waves of dark hair gracefully outlined the white temples, the lips trembled slightly, but ceased to do so as she set them tightly and folded her hands as though the movement were born of a resolve. There was no cause for alarm, it was only a gray squirrel which came chattering down to the rail fence which crossed the brook farther down, where the stream had in a measure gained control of itself, and was

taking its way in a little more quiet and orderly fashion.

Within sight of her resting-place towered the stately forms of the Seven Giants, a beautiful clump of oak trees whose branches spread far and wide. The seat near their base was a favorite haunt of Leon Thorpe; and he frequently came there to study. In fact it was there that Nellie most often found him, when she had a letter from Olga to read to him. Though distance made his heart grow fonder, it did not seem to have the same effect upon Olga, for she never wrote to Leon. His was not a passing passion to be lightly tossed aside, for he loved the airy creature with all the fulness of his nature, and though the sea divided them, her face was enshrined in his memory. She wrote often of their journeyings from one place of note to another, and as long as they did not settle in any particular place, his courage kept up, and hope held sway.

But it was not to see Leon, nor to read him a letter, that Nellie had found her way to the brook on this particular day. At Madame Catlin's Seminary receptions were occasionally held, and the most eligible of the college men invited. Clyde Delamere had been among them, and at the

last one, while in Nellie's company, had allowed her to examine a quaint signet ring which he wore. As he left that evening, he had slipped it on her finger with the remark, "Wear it till you see me again, *Au revoir!*!" and was gone. Her heart had stood still for a moment. Was it the magnetism of his touch, or was there some charm about the ring which sent a faintness through her whole being? Neither. It was simply a telegraphic message from her wide-awake conscience, that she was now liable to commit what approached nearer to a sin than she had ever been guilty of before in all her child life. What would mother and father say?

They had heard her speak of Clyde Delamere, they knew he was a Yale student, and that, as a class, they were to be avoided. Mothers looked grave when their daughters fell into the company of students, for many with broken hearts and ruined lives, had lived on in the old Elm City as class after class of Yale men finished their college course and left the place. But as to this quaint ring, she hardly knew what to do about it, heartily wishing he had it safely back in his possession; and yet, she would like to see him just once more, why, she hardly knew. He had said that some

day she might find him fishing at Tumbling Foam ; but she had looked for his coming day after day, and he came not. She had said nothing about it at home, and she really would like to get out of the scrape without their knowing anything about it ; for to her there seemed something almost compromising about a girl's having in her possession a ring belonging to a young man with whom she had so slight an acquaintance. She was about to return to the house when a branch again crackled, and this time she saw a manly form passing in and out between the forest trees. In a moment Clyde Delamere had swung himself lightly across the brook, and was clasping her hand in a glad welcome, his flushed face watching hers closely, to learn whether or not she was glad to see him.

“ Why, Miss Argyle, this is an unexpected, though hoped-for pleasure. Are you as glad to see me as I am to meet you ? ”

“ I am glad to get rid of this dragon. It has been a terrible trouble to me, I wondering how you would get it back again ; for I dare not trust it to the mails,” and she handed him the curious ring.

“ Pray be seated, Miss Argyle, I am sorry to

learn that the ring has been a care to you. Do not run away, please, stay a few moments. It is quite a walk over here from the Junction."

"I fear you took the most roundabout way if you came by the turnpike. You should have taken that old road to the left, when you reached the sign board. If I had known you wanted to come, I could have told you the nearest way."

"But I dare not tell you that I was coming surely, for fear you would forbid me."

And her heart came up in her throat again, and seemed to lie there fluttering.

"I have guarded your ring very carefully, for I thought, by the crest, it might be an heirloom."

"So it is, did I never tell you about it? Sit down, you are standing too long. If you must go, wait till I tell you a story. That ring belonged to my father. He was the youngest son of a Scotch baron. My uncle now owns the estate. He is a grizzly old bachelor, and I assure you I shall not imitate him if I can prevail upon some little dark-eyed beauty to share my lot with me."

Why did her cheeks burn again so hotly that he must observe them? Could his speech have any reference to her? She put aside the thought, but the pure little heart fluttered on.

"Yes," he repeated, as he placed the ring on his finger and unwound the line from the reel, "I hope some day a certain sweet-faced little friend of mine will take pity on an old bachelor and marry me."

"No doubt you will gain her consent when you ask her," Nellie innocently replied.

"Do you mean it?" He spoke in a low thrilling tone that frightened her. She started up, saying, "I must go, mother will miss me, I have been gone so long."

She felt that she must run away, but chance or fate was helping him out. As she arose to go the hook on the line caught in the flounce of her airy muslin dress.

"There, little one, I have caught you; so you see you are not to run away from me. Be seated a moment while I disengage the hook."

"No, thank you, I can get it out;" and she did; for she would not accept of his assistance. Whether the move had been made purposely or not, she could not tell; but the fact of the case was that she was still sitting there not two feet away from him, she a budding innocent girl, he a winner of women's hearts. He endeavored

to continue the conversation in a less ardent manner, thinking he would try and not frighten her away again.

"Yes, I am of Scotch descent, and you are, too, I judge, by your name; as the Argyles come from away back in the Scotch ages. You look more like the French, I think, though."

"Mother's name was Ellen Douglas and father's of course was Argyle," answered Nellie honestly.

"I have here in my pocket a match-box made of agate from the hills on my uncle's estate;" and he thrust his hand into his vest-pocket. With an exclamation of pain, he hastily withdrew it; and there imbedded in the thick of his thumb was another fishhook.

"You see your turn has come now. I wonder if you are not sorry you didn't let me go sooner?"

"No, indeed, Miss Argyle; I assure you a few moments of your society is well worth this slight pain."

"But it is too bad, and I am very sorry. You must come home with me at once, for mother can remove the hook, I am sure. She has a case of surgical instruments, and many an ugly sliver

has she extracted. Why, she's almost as good as Dr. Strong for such wounds."

"Perhaps I ought to go to him," said Clyde, although he was glad of half a chance to visit Nellie's home.

"Certainly not," she replied. "It is too far in the first place, and mother can do it just as well;" she wouldn't have him go over to Dr. Strong's for anything.

They hurried up through the meadows, not pausing to observe the beautiful views which nature had in store at every turn ; for the wound was growing quite painful. Mrs. Argyle was in the sitting-room as Nellie rushed in at the back door, through the well-room and kitchen, calling, "Oh, mother, do come quick !"

"What is it, child ?" and she rose to meet her, a look of surprise passing over her features as she saw a strange young man behind Nellie.

"This is Mr. Delamere, mother, whom I have often met at Madame Catlin's. He has been fishing in our brook and unfortunately has stuck a fishhook in his hand. He thought it best to go to the doctor, but I knew you could get it out if you tried."

She had said it all in a breath, and in spite of

the pain, Clyde was smiling at the odd introduction. Mrs. Argyle lost no time in preparing for the operation. Nellie stood by sympathetically feeling every thrust of the keen-pointed little lance, but the hook was at length removed, and the hand bandaged. Then the trio sat and chatted. After a time the deacon put in an appearance. Nellie was quite pleased to think things had taken such a conscience-easing turn for her, and, in his way, Clyde Delamere was equally well pleased. Of course he returned to the city with an invitation to call again, and he took advantage of the hospitality at Primrose Bank. Noble Ralph Strong fell into the background. Though always an admirer of Nellie, he had never known how much he was afraid of losing her, until he saw her so frequently in companionship with Clyde. And he was a wooer after her own heart; so she deceived herself; just such a knight as she had expected might come some day; for girls do expect such things to come to pass. He sent her the most exquisite flowers, and they drove in the sunshine, and walked in the moonlight, and went boating in the twilight, all through those beautiful days. It seemed that summer was prolonged to allow

of more time for their wooing. When winter came, with its round of gayeties, Nellie's head was quite turned.

The deacon was doing considerable thinking about this time; and Mrs. Argyle's heart almost misgave her, for she had an inkling of Ralph's regard for Nellie; yet she thought best to let things go their own way. The deacon began to be a little uneasy, and more than once he said to his wife: "If I thought that fellow was only making love to our girl for the sport of it, I'd soon settle his hash for him." But they finally decided to let things run their course, at the same time keeping careful watch, and then there would be no blame at any one's door; but if they had thought it possible that Clyde Delamere was trifling with Nellie, there would have been a tornado in the Argyle household.

The spring had come and gone, with its balmy air and bursting buds and beauty all about. One early August evening Clyde put in his appearance. It was such a beautiful night, would Nellie be allowed to go for a row on the pond? The moon shone as bright as day, and all nature was in a wooing mood. Arm in arm they sauntered toward the pond. Once out upon the yielding

waters all was forgotten save that they were alone together on a faultless night under a bewitchingly moonlit sky. Out into the middle of the pond floated the boat, the oars resting in their locks, while Nellie and Clyde lived through the hour that comes but once in a maiden's life; the hour of her first proposal. He had said as they rowed out over the gleaming waves, "I have a little news to tell you, darling, I wonder if you will care."

"What is it, Clyde?" and it seemed as though a hand grasped her heart-strings, so she could hardly breathe.

"I have a summons to cross the water on the next steamer; would you care if I went, little one?"

She dropped her head in her hands and answered never a word. Then it was that he rested the oars, and moved to her side.

"Then you would care, just a little?"

His voice was deep and low, strangely thrilling, while his hot breath against her cheek caused a burning pain at her heart.

"You must not go," she whispered; as he held her closely to his side, while her curly head lay for a moment against his strong arm.

"You do, then, really care?" The hot tears were dropping on the hand with which he tried to raise the tear-dimmed eyes to meet his love-lighted gaze. "Listen to me, little one, do not sob so, you make my heart ache. I must go, but I will come back again; for there is only one girl in the universe who will receive the first invitation to my wedding, and that girl is Nellie Argyle. Will you accept my invitation, little one, seal it with a kiss;" and she raised her lips to meet his. The night was bewitching, and the moments rolled on. Then, when they came back to earth again, Clyde reluctantly picked up the oars and took our Nellie home. There were promises to write, promises of fidelity, in fact all the promises that young lovers always make; but in spite of the many heart-aches three weeks found Clyde across the Atlantic, and Nellie Argyle at Primrose Bank.

Clyde's departure and subsequent coolness had opened her eyes. A strange sensation, half dread and half happiness, had gained possession of her, and she could not analyze it; only, as time wore on, she realized it was not love which had filled her heart in response to Clyde's enthusiastic wooing, but rather more like a responsive mag-

netism in answer to that which he had exerted over her. With the reaction came the knowledge that she could live without him; in truth she felt more free of heart than ever, now that the ocean was between them; but she, innocent of the wiles of professional lovers, was so afraid she had done wrong, that she worried herself sick over it. In a few weeks the reaction came, and Nellie tossed on a bed of pain, her poor little body racked by fever. Old Doctor Strong was away with his wife, but Doctor Ralph was at home. What a sad heart he bore to and from the house where his idol lay with her life at the lowest ebb, and he must fight to win her back to life only to be snatched from him by that other. But his love for her was strong. He fought for her life with the fierceness of despair. He filled her lungs with air from his own sturdy ones, and sent his own strong life-blood coursing through her pulseless veins.

Over and over again he called all his medical skill to aid him in bringing back the quivering heart-beats that at times ceased to be discernible. Night and day he was by her side, calling on all the powers of heaven to use him as the means of saving that dear life, though destined never to be

his own; yet far dearer to him than the life of Ralph Strong. Over and over again, in imagination, had he closed the dark gray eyes, and gazed upon the perfectly chiselled features, feeling that the weary brain had never known of the deep pure love which had lived for her within his breast. He had even gone so far as to see in imagination the casket-lid fastened down, and the last sad rites performed; and had felt that his life's light had gone out; that the love of his life was buried. But Heaven was more kind than he had faith to believe. She lived. And how resolutely he set about building up the frail little body.

It seemed almost as though he were saving her for himself. She had been so near to the boundary, that that other might almost have lost a claim. A happier man never lived than Ralph Strong when Nellie was able to ride out with him for only a little way. Many things were possible. Clyde Delamere was across the Atlantic Ocean, and Nellie and he were here; but,—and then came the dashing of rising hope, when the thought came that perhaps, after all, Clyde might ever be first in her affections.

CHAPTER XIV.

A SUMMER NIGHT'S VIGIL.

“Stand up against the rising sun :
Your shadow on the grass
Shall trace the limit of my world,
Beyond, I shall not pass.”



THE months were beginning to count up since Clyde Delamere had said good-bye to Nellie. Nearly a year had gone and the roses were again tinting her cheeks, so Father Argyle had said on the morning of this day when she had been whortleberrying. And now she was kneeling by the open window gazing out into the cool summer night, and watching the sparkling points of light over in the hollow where the village lay. The shower had cleared away all the haze in the atmosphere, and the honeysuckle around the window was all the more fragrant for its burden of raindrops, and the tall white August lilies sent forth an intoxicating fragrance. How the stars gleamed

and twinkled, while each steadily shining planet majestically sped on its course! How weirdly the shadows of the trees fell against every light-colored object, casting uncanny moving images clearly in the foreground, dimly in the distance! Above the noise of the summer insects, sounding their nightly chant, came the steady roar of Tumbling Foam dam. She felt it was good to be there, under that mantle of solemn quiet thrown over a sleeping world.

She singled out the light which she knew shone from Ralph Strong's study window. He was there now, busy with his ponderous volumes. Some day he would leave the little village in all probability and make a home for himself somewhere, where he could work up a large practice. And a little pain of dread tugged for a moment at her heart-strings. Why was that, I wonder? She was engaged to Clyde Delamere, but Clyde had been gone for months, and she had scarcely heard from him. Why was it that Ralph Strong always came up before her mind's eye in comparison with Clyde Delamere? Ralph with his broad shoulders and frank open face, yet full of tenderness and a something back of his courteousness which she had never yet quite

been able to discover. She liked Ralph Strong. She was afraid she liked him better than Clyde, who was fascinating while he was in one's company, like those vari-colored blinking stars up there in the blackness of incomprehensible space, but Ralph was like the planets in their intensely quiet, steady gleaming.

She sighed as she analyzed the traitor thoughts in her mind; she had not spoken them aloud, but was almost afraid she had. Did girls ever have such misgivings after they had been engaged for awhile? Of course the engagement was just between themselves, and wouldn't it be strange if nothing came of it? Such things had happened. A little cry, half hope, half joy, started up from her heart, but she hushed it back for fear it was wrong.

When Clyde was there she thought she loved him—she put the "thought" in now—then she would not have harbored the word in connection with the others. Had he not held her close to himself, and, pressing her curly head down upon his breast, bent his own face so close to hers that his moustache swept her hot cheek, and then how he had begged for one parting kiss, measuring his happiness by the wealth of the world

if she would only grant him that boon. And then she had disengaged herself from his close embrace, and, standing alone, with her dark eyes looking soberly up into his, had quietly said, "Clyde Delamere, I shall never kiss but one man excepting my father, and that one will be my husband. I believe that a woman's kisses should be kept sacredly for the one whom God's word makes a part of her life until death shall part them. You must wait patiently until the right to claim them is yours."

He had taken off his hat involuntarily while she was speaking, she was so like an angel in her simple purity of thought. She was far too good for a union with such a man, and he knew it, too; but do we not all covet that which we know to be best, whatever our needs may be. That night, as Clyde Delamere left her, the last night he saw her, he thought how fortunate he was in the possession of such a treasure, true as steel, pure as a dove, bright and winsome—what a gem of a wife she would be. He could wait patiently for the wifely kiss, dear little sweetheart.

And now she was harboring thoughts of Ralph. She knew she should never have thought of such a thing had he not taken her under his protect-

ing wing that day during the thunder-storm. How it had poured, and how his courage had sustained her as they sped along the mountain path, dark as the overhanging trees and black clouds could make it, illuminated almost every moment by the lurid flashes of the lightning. His courage had wonderfully sustained her, and she could not help but admire him as he imparted his cool-headedness to the foaming animal dashing along at a terrific speed. How sublimely the thunder rattled among the mountain ledges, and how awe-inspiring were the sheets of lightning which one instant lighted up the mountain path like noon-day, and then left them in inky darkness!

Ralph had driven straight home with her before the fury of the storm had abated and set her down on the front door-sill as dry as though the elements had not been indulging in a terrific outburst. She had thanked him, but had not asked him in ; such is the perversity of woman's nature. The very thing she wanted most to do, she did not do. Why? Because, a woman's reason—unfinished, and unfathomable mental reservation often lies within a because.

Then she began at the beginning and went all

over it again. She had been berrying out in the great whortleberry pasture, where the bushes grew thickly together and were well-laden with the shining black fruit. She had kept on picking while the sun shone brightly, and again more dimly as the white foam-like thunder-heads crept slowly up from behind the Hanging Hills. It was more comfortable picking in the shadow of the clouds. What a quiet stillness settled all about her ! The birds hushed their carols, and a solitary tree-toad in the great chestnut tree which stood alone in the wide berry-pasture, croaked his never failing prophecy. The clouds overhead grew darker while low rumblings and slight flash reflections came up from the northwest. Nellie was picking rapidly now, her pail almost full. A great drop struck upon her hand, then another and another—the shower was coming—there was no shelter but the tree. Common sense told her that a drenching was preferable to taking shelter under a tree, so she picked up her pail, and started for the road. But another shelter was at hand.

As she reached the highway she saw a cloud of dust in the distance, and out from it came a horse and carriage with one occupant. If it were only some one whom she knew, was her hope. It

surely was Dr. Ralph. "Miss Argyle, allow me;" and before she knew it Nellie and her berries were in the carriage headed for home. She was safely under cover when the fury of the storm burst upon them.

"How fortunate," said Ralph. "You would have been drenched."

"I am very glad you happened along."

"So am I," he answered quietly. He did not tell her that more than an hour before, on his way to see a patient, he had seen the pink sunbonnet at the far end of the lot, and was pretty sure the owner was Nellie Argyle. He had noticed the shower approaching, and had hurried back hoping to overtake her, with what result we have seen.

"Oh, isn't it dreadful, Doctor," as a blinding flash and deafening crash came at the same instant.

"It is sublime!"

"Are you never afraid?"

"Never afraid, yet often overawed."

"It frightens me dreadfully lately, though I used to enjoy thunderstorms so well. I would sit at the window and watch the lightning."

Flash—then a deafening roar—it had struck a barn not twenty rods away. Nellie blanched with

fear. Up on his haunches reared the now thoroughly affrighted horse.

“Steady, boy, steady,” came Ralph’s firm, quiet tones. It might have been a flash of summer heat-lightning for all he appeared to notice it, but Nellie was nearly paralyzed with fright. How gently he had soothed her fears, how tenderly he had placed his hand on hers, clasped in agony! “Are you faint, Nellie?”—the old school-boy way of speaking, and she had not resented it.

“Just a little,” came the answer from under the pink sunbonnet.

“We shall soon be at home, and I am glad, for still another shower is coming.”

In three minutes more she was at home with her berries in the kitchen, and Doctor Ralph was giving thanks for the thunderstorm, and blessing his lucky stars. The light went out in Ralph’s study window before Nellie arose from her knees, and I think the recording angel was satisfied with the turn affairs were taking.

CHAPTER XV.

AN EPISODE AT ROSE CLIFF.

“Life is too short for any bitter feeling;
Time is the best avenger, if we wait;
The years speed by, and on their wings bring healing;
We have no room for anything like hate.”

“ OR the land sakes, Jared Cooper, if you don’t beat the Dutch!”

“What’s up now, Hester,” drawled Jared from the depths of the weekly paper which had just arrived.

“Up! Considerable I should say! It’s only by the unlikeliest miracle that I ever discovered it.”

“Wall, ain’t you a talking pretty loud, Hester, or what on airth air you a blowin’ about, anyway?” said Jared, as his chair came forward with a thump, and stood on its four legs, as was originally intended it should do.

“I’m a blowin’ about my sister Eunice, if you wanter know.”

“I hain’t done nothin’ to your sister Eunice, not as I know on.”

"Yes, you hev too; you've been all the cause of the silence there's been between us for ever so many years."

"How in all time do you make that out, I'd like to know?"

"Well, I'll tell yer, lively! I was just a wantin' a piece of tissue paper to trace a pattern outen a magazine with, and just came back here to hunt for a piece and found it. Then I turned round ter get down and spied a little piece of paper sticken out from the bottom edge of that drawer there, and so I pulled it out; and lo! and behold, it's my letter I wrote to Eunice Stiles sixteen years ago or more."

"Wall, that dus beat the bugs," drawled Jared.

The indignant woman was poised on the wood-bottomed chair, one hand resting on her hip and the other holding at arm's length a dusty yellow envelope.

"Look at it and see for yourself," ejaculated the irate Hester. "If you don't 'tend to other folks' mail matter no better than you 'tend to mine, it's a wonder to all goodness they don't take the post-office away from you;" and she bounced off the chair, and up the stairs, nor stopped until

she was ready to begin a letter to her sister Eunice.

“She allus was kinder touchy that way,” Mrs. Cooper said to herself; “and to think how as I had been a laying it up to her door all these years alongback. She might be dead and buried by this time, but I’ll write anyhow.”

Sputter—sizz—splash—sizz—went the tea-kettle boiling over. Hester hastened to set it aside.

“Land sakes, its five o’clock and no tea a goin’ yit!” So the teapot was brought out, the pattern was thought of and traced, and the letter was not written. If there is anything in the magnetism of thought, perhaps this was the reason why in a distant city at that moment Eunice Stiles sat by her south kitchen window looking out into space, seeing nothing of the landscape, her mind wholly intent on the sister who lived over and beyond the blue line of hills. There was no one now but Reginald and Mrs. Dean, and Aunt Eunice, in the house on Myrtle Avenue; and the latter was revolving a scheme in her mind. After tea, when the lamps were lighted, and the invalid had been carefully attended to, Mr. Dean and Aunt Eunice sat before the open grate.

“Reginald, has it ever occurred to you that a change would do Ethel good?”

“Yes, I have thought so often of late. Can you suggest anything?”

“Can you come to no conclusion?”

“None!”

“I have been thinking that I am getting along in years, and a little while near the old home might take away this loneliness that creeps over me so often lately.”

“What is your plan?”

“Could we go for the summer, at least, to Westbridge?”

“Certainly, and the change may do Ethel good, too. I will take a run up to Dr. Strong’s, and see what I can do to find a comfortable place for you.”

As a result of the foregoing conversation, a pleasant roomy cottage between Fairbury and Westbridge was made ready for occupancy, and another month found Mr. and Mrs. Dean and Eunice Stiles settling down for a quiet summer at Rose Cliff. The same tangle of vines grew about the door as grew there years ago, when Mrs. Sharon and Katie had spent many weary weeks there; but under the careful management

of Matt, Dr. Strong's indispensable man, the grounds about had been made to present a very home-like appearance; but on account of a special request from Aunt Eunice, the tangle of wild roses growing about the edge and down the face of the rock, which had suggested the name of the place, was left unmolested, and grew on in its own wild fashion, making a far more pretty adornment than could a master gardener's hand. Sister Hester had been over and had done with a sturdy good will all that she could to make amends for the long silence caused by Jared's carelessness:

“Just think, it's as long ago as—as—why—as when Mis' Argyle adopted Nellie. I mentioned it in that letter you never got—and that was fourteen years ago and more.”

“They have been very quiet years—very little in them to cause remembrance of days or dates to be stored away.”

“Well, now you're here for the summer, you must git acquainted with Mis' Argyle and Nellie. They're as nice folks as any hereabouts, exceptin' the doctor and his wife. But Mis' Argyle is real homey and you'll allus feel as if you wisht she'd a-stayed a spell longer. But fer pity's sake,

Eunice, if yer see that Sabra Allen a-comin', bar the door—fer she's worse than the itch !

“Why so?”

“ Well, all I say is, if you don't want your business peddled from Dan to Beersheba, don't mention it to her.”

“ Don't worry on that score, Hester. I've kept my own council too many years to be carried by storm.”

“ She's dretful palaverin' and honey-mouthed, but she will draw you out, and you can't help yourself unless you're uncommon sharp ; and then she'll outwit you or corner you, and you'll have to tell her the truth, or else an out-an'-out lie.”

“ Well, wait till she comes, Hester, and I'll warrant you I'll make out.”

“ H'm ! well, she's a comin' now ; I felt it in my bones, I allus do when that iron-weed's around. Fer land's sake, don't mention Argyles', fer she's allus ready ter haul 'em ter town and back again.”

There came a quick rap at the door, and a turning of the handle as though the new-comer was used to “dropping in.” But Aunt Eunice was there to admit the visitor. She met her with a reserved air, which caused Mrs. Allen to mentally ejaculate, “Stuck up!” but her face was all

eagerness. She had come a-hunting. Hester Cooper turned from the window which she was polishing, till it shone like a mirror. "Good-mornin', Mis' Allen, you're out early makin' calls it seems. My sister, Miss Stiles, Mis' Allen;" and she turned back to give the window an extra touch. She was irritated because this woman had forced herself upon them in this manner, but it was "her way," and she long ago came to the conclusion that she had a perfect right to do so, considering herself a privileged personage. Saints preserve us from such; for they crop out the world over, these dogs that go about forever carrying and fetching bones. She had a fresh morsel this morning.

"Glad you've come to sojourn amongst us, Miss Stiles. Hope you'll like it here—most every one does. There's another new-comer in town, too, I hear."

"Who?" inquired Hester, herself caught by the bait.

"Why, a young woman up to Argyle's." Somebody that used to work in the school where Nellie went. She's lost her mother lately and Nellie's took her home. They'll need to start a foundlin' asylum next I guess—" this last added with a

queer twist of the mouth and squint of the eyes, peculiar to this peculiar woman. Aunt Eunice said nothing, and Hester did likewise. She wasn't going to get caught in any more traps.

"Yes," Sabra finally continued, "they do say this girl thinks a sight of Nellie."

"How is your family, Mrs. Allen?" ventured Aunt Eunice, to change the subject.

"Oh, middlin', Geoffrey, he's drove to death with hayin' and all, and the garden weeds is showin' up pretty well."

"Do you help him care for his garden?"

"Mercy, no! I hain't got time. Takes me all my time to tend to my own affairs."

"Good laws!" groaned Hester.

"What's the matter, Mis' Cooper?"

"Oh, nothin', only this winder sticks with the new paint."

"Wall, it dus look like another place sence you people put a hand to it. I allus said it ud be pretty if 'twas fixed up, and so it is. Ain't nobody else to hum? I don't hear nobody stirrin'. Didn't know but I could drop in a few minutes and make a change for the invalid. I hear you're takin' care of one, Miss Stiles."

"Mrs. Dean does not enjoy the best of health,

that is true, but she is not at home this morning."

"Oh," and how disappointed she was, for she meant to carry a full description to Mrs. Pritchard that afternoon. "Has she gone out ridin'?"

"Oh, no; calling, I believe."

"Oh!" disappointed again. She would have to try once more later on.

"Are you acquainted with Nellie Argyle, Miss Stiles?"

"No, not yet;" said Aunt Eunice.

"She's a good-looking little maid, but too airy and touchy for anything. She's got awful high notions, if she ain't only adopted, and might have blue blood in her veins by her actions, though where she was got nobody knows."

"Indeed," said one of her listeners. The other was ready to burst. She was filling up so inside, that she thought she could not hold in another moment. The next volley struck the magazine.

"Yes, there wa'n't no one in the village good enough for her, so she had to get some good-looking chap from the college, and now he's gone to parts unknown, and she's tryin' to rope in the Doctor's son; though I have seen her takin' walks with Leon Thorpe, and little Geoff see her

one Sunday a sittin' up in the Seven Giants with him, both a readin' a letter. It was from furrin parts, I know, cause little Geoff he crept near enough to listen: but land, the young'n couldn't tell nothin' 'bout big words and names of things that was in the letter. She was most a cryin' though, and he awful sober like; so something's to pay, Lord knows what."

The explosion came. Hester's face grew a purple tinge, then the blood receded, leaving her as white as her tanned skin would allow. She stopped with the polishing chamois in one hand, the other raised as though warding off a blow.

"Sabra Allen, you've said enough. How the Lord ever lets you live to say such mean contemptible things about that dear child, I don't know. If I was in His place, I wouldn't have you blackenin' the face of the earth any longer. She tryin' to rope in the Doctor's son! Why, any one with half an eye can see he's dead set on her; but keeps a respectful distance on account of that other one that's gone away. For my part I'd like to see the Doctor's son get her. To my mind they're just suited, and it would be back of my time since Westbridge turned out as good a look-

ing couple. As for Leon Thorpe, that girl in Europe took his heart with her, and it'll never come back till she brings it. Nellie and Leon are good friends, and I say away with any one who speaks ill of either of them. I'd trust the whole three of 'em anywhere, but I wouldn't trust an Allen in this town, as far as I could throw a cow by the tail. As for that letter,—that was their own business probably ; and I'd whip, within an inch of their life, any young one of mine, if I had any, who'd be so sneakin' mean as to go a listenin' and a tattlin' other people's private business. I ain't no believer in wrong doin's, but when people gits to makin' mountains out of mole-hills, and insinuatin' against pure-minded, straightforward young people, or old ones either for that matter, Hester Cooper ain't the one to stand by and listen without liftin' her voice against it."

Mrs. Allen sat perfectly still on her chair. She was almost annihilated by this outburst. She did not know what to say for herself, but managed to reiterate :

“ Well, I didn't mean no harm and you needn't get so excited, Mis' Cooper ; but I do think its kinder imprudent fer her to be playin' fast and loose with such nice young men as Ralph Strong

and Leon Thorpe ; and she a nobody, when there's Florence Pritchard, and a good many more just as good, and may be better than she is."

"Sabra Allen, put your hand on your mouth and your mouth in the dust. You ain't any more fit to be passin' judgment on them young folks, than you are to be a preacher ; and I'm certain sure you'll have to go up a good many steps of the ladder before you're fit to sit at the same table with Nellie Argyle. As fer playin' fast and loose, that's an out an' out lie, and speakin' of Florence Pritchard, she ain't to be mentioned in the same day with Nellie. I ain't no backbiter, but I won't have her held up over Nellie, when she ain't a bit deservin' ; and you've come to the wrong place to run down folks, and you oughter known that before now."

Miss Stiles arose and stood by Hester. Her voice was low and distinct as she said, "I agree with Sister Hester perfectly. I wish to hear only good of those with whom I come in contact, unless obliged to do otherwise, as I have been this morning. My home has never been a trunk line for the sewerage of tongues, nor will it ever be. Good-morning, Mrs. Allen, and remember whatever you say of us, tell the whole truth, for one

side of a story is always good until the other is told."

Sabra took her departure without another word. She was thoroughly nonplused.

"She's gone and I'm glad if I have made her mad. She's the worst backbiter in the known world, and I wonder she's let to live."

"Well, Hester, you did give her a dressing down, but I think she needed it. The idea of her coming here to me, a stranger, to air her unpleasant ideas about people I don't know, and perhaps never shall know."

"But I hope you will get real well acquainted with them, for they're as nice people as there are in Westbridge or Fairbury either."

"What about this adopted girl?"

"Oh, she's every inch a lady; and that's what Mis' Allen and Mis' Pritchard can't stand. The Argyles ain't nowhere near their stamp."

"But this Nellie?"

"Oh, they got her in an asylum when she was a little tot, and they've brought her up like their own. She didn't know she was adopted till she found it out through the chattering of those two magpies."

"How about this lover who is abroad?"

"Oh, for him I don't care very much. I think

he was taken with her odd, yet spicy ways, but I hardly think anything will come of it. From the way she blushes when Ralph Strong appears, I think her heart is in Westbridge yet."

"And Ralph Strong is one of Mr. Dean's boys."

"Exactly."

"Well, there's plenty of chance for things to work out right yet."

"Yes, if that old besom don't do too much meddlin'."

"You spoke of some girl Leon Thorpe had an eye on."

"Oh, Olga Mitchell. She was a perfect fairy. Her father was minister here for several years. They're pretty well off, and do considerable travellin'. She's with them now abroad. Nellie and Olga were fast friends, and I'll bet anything that letter was from Olga. She is light-haired, and Nellie dark; but they were both little ladies, and used to set a sight of store by each other."

Mrs. Allen went from there to Mrs. Pritchard's and opened her heart. Their joint conclusion was that Miss Stiles was a grain too airy, and Hester Cooper had better mind her own affairs; thus expecting more of Hester than they were capable of doing themselves.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE BARON'S HEIR.

“ My hands, my limbs grow nerveless ;
My brain feels racked, bewildered ;
Let the old timbers part.”

T was a dark and dismal night, with a wild storm raging. High up the mountain-side among weather-worn crags and overlooking wide-spreading moors stood the castle of Armadale, a gaunt, gray, rumbling relic of ancient feudal times. It seemed more fit for a rookery for bats and owls than a human habitation. Its eeriness was still more enhanced by the rattling of sleet against the small panes of the deep-set windows; while the searching blast shrieked and moaned despairingly among the jagged cliffs. Inky darkness reigned supreme. Within the castle a strange quiet rested over all. A man, in the garb of a nurse, threw open a small window and peered out into the night, but a sheet of sleet and rain met him full in the face, causing

him to hastily close the window and step back into the dimly-lighted room. In one corner stood a huge, canopied bedstead. A movement in that direction arrested his attention, and in an instant he was bending over a prostrate form, and holding aloft a lighted wax candle, as he gazed anxiously into the shrunken visage of an aged man.

“What is it, my lord?”

“Has he come?” was the whispered response.

“Not yet, my lord.”

“I fear he will arrive too late.”

Brandon turned to the table where stood an array of medicine-bottles, and preparing a strengthening mixture, administered it to the patient. Meanwhile, dashing over the rough country roads, now encountering rocky stretches, and again sunk nearly to the saddle-girth in mud, were two horsemen. Had the animals not been familiar with the way, their riders would have had a poor chance of reaching their destination; but, sure-footed and faithful, the horses bore their riders safely up the steep ascent even to the drawbridge of the castle. The portcullis was raised, and our horsemen rode into the dimly lighted hallway. A hostler stood ready to take their foaming steeds, while another man-servant removed their sleet-

encrusted garments, and conducted them to comfortable quarters. The elder man who had acted as guide addressed the younger.

"Sir, we had better ascend at once to the sick-chamber. Sir Basil is sinking rapidly."

A servant with a flickering taper led the way. They passed over stone floors, through halls with heavy oaken-panelled walls, till the guide paused before a massive door. One rap brought the nurse who quickly admitted them.

"I have just administered a little brandy, and he has rallied slightly. I feared you would be too late." He preceded the men as they approached the sufferer.

Bending low over the feeble old man, Brandon said, "He is coming, my lord, shall you be able to see him?"

"Ah, yes," whispered the baron, "how soon will he be here?"

"Even now, my lord."

The nurse stepped aside, and Clyde Delamere laid his hand on that of the old man, which was even then purpling with the chill of death. A shudder ran through his veins,—he had never before been in the presence of the last reaper.

"Bend lower," the old man whispered, as he

used his feeble strength to draw the young man nearer his withered, ashen-hued face.

Clyde did as requested. Speech had deserted him for the instant.

“The light, Brandon,” from the dying baron.

The nurse held the candle so its feeble rays shone full on the young man’s countenance.

“You are very like your father, lad.”

“I am pleased to hear you say that, Uncle.”

“I have not long to live, yet there is much I would say, if I only could.”

“You, Brandon,—Doctor,—come near and listen to what I have to say. Albany, lad; let me call you so, it was your father’s name. I loved your mother, but she chose my brother, aye, a poor younger son, in preference to me, a prospective baron, with a landed estate. I could not bear to see them in their happiness, and after their marriage neither ever entered these castle doors, which, since that day, when he took all the sunshine out of my life, have ever been closed to woman. I am a lonely old man, having lived here year after year on the memory of the love I bore your mother. You are my next of kin. To you I leave the estate and baronial crest of Armandale. You, lad, will be Sir Albany; it is my lat-

est wish that you bear your father's name; and may it bring you more happiness than I have known."

He paused exhausted. Brandon gave him another draught, and after a moment he whispered, "The Dragon of Armadale, your father had it."

"I have it here, my lord," and he placed in the clammy hand that quaint ring with the dragon engraved upon it.

"Yes, that is it. I should know it by the feeling of it, if I found it in the Catacombs. That will be of as much use to you as a letter of credit, lad, that and your title go hand in hand. What, are you leaving me, lad? Don't desert the poor old man at the last moment—I shall be gone soon—ah—I cannot see you—what—ah, Miriam!"

The poor old face was transformed for an instant. Hope, love, joy, all stood revealed as by a gleam of heavenly light. Clyde bowed his head as the old Baron breathed his mother's name. When he raised his eyes to look upon the sufferer—he was not there. The gaunt destroyer had claimed his own. When his presence was no longer needed, Sir Albany retired to the apartment assigned him. Although wearied and

travel-worn he could not sleep. Until far into the night the storm continued unabated, the wind's weird shrieks and moans being sufficient to drive sleep from the brain of one less excited than was our young traveller.

Much had occurred in a short time. First came the intelligence to this college youth preparing for the bar, that a distant relative was ill; next an imperative summons to proceed at once to the sick man's bedside; and then the knowledge that this man, a peer, was letting his mantle fall upon the shoulders of this aspiring young man. He was not quite thoroughly enough American to laugh at titles; and, had he been, the title was his just the same. Sir Albany, Baron of Armadale; what a title to lay at the feet of that little girl over there among the hills of New England! Sleep came at length to the weary eyelids as the storm lulled and died away. Morning approached, and had spread her rosy mantle over the eastern sky several hours before Sir Albany arose and gazed out over the strange landscape.

Have you never been suddenly called away to spend the night, and experienced that strange feeling which comes over one as he arises from sleep and looks out upon a landscape which has

never before met his gaze? If you have, then you know with what mingled feelings Sir Albany stood looking out upon that dazzling landscape, over which the sun shone brightly, as though endeavoring to atone for the general disturbance created by the elements the night before.

All of Clyde's boyhood days had been spent among the hills and vales of the Eastern States, with their long mountain ranges, and wide reaches of meadow-land, where, in the fall, bloomed sun-clad golden-rod, and asters fair to look upon. Here, as he gazed from the narrow stone-bound window which swung open like a door, he beheld a scene of rugged grandeur such as untraveled eyes could appreciate to the fullest extent. Below the grass-cushioned weather-beaten crags, lay the downs with purpling heather in that soul-inspiring light of the morning sun; while away in the hazy distance, rising from a sea of green and gold, and outlined against the roseate sky beyond, loomed the ruined walls of an ancient abbey. In very truth this must be the old Mother Country, for all the surroundings bespoke an age of centuries. And all these broad acres of grassy downs, and heath-grown moors, belonged to the Baron of Armadale. Surely, truth is stranger than fiction.

How would his lady mother have looked upon his exaltation? Would she have been pleased to have seen him in the place his father would have filled had he lived till now?

In all probability she would for the "pure blue Scotch bluid" which ran in her son's veins, had been to her a source of great pride. He knew he had titled relatives, though his mother had taught him never to anticipate any renewing of ties; but it had all come upon him like a blare of trumpets and blazon of arms; and more or less mental confusion followed.

Like most men born on American soil, he had not as much respect for an inherited title as for a well-earned professional one; such as is free to all men of learning and well-balanced brains. But it makes a difference perhaps whether one stands afar off and looks at the golden fruit, or whether he loiters beneath the tree, and catches it as it falls into his willing grasp. Sir Albany,—that was his father's name, and his own baptismal middle name. The deceased baron had signified it as his chief desire that Clyde should assume that name, and fortunately, from an American view, he had a perfect right to do so. What would his college mates say,—and little Nell,—for of course it

would get into the papers. They never missed such little bits of information.

Again his thoughts turned in another direction. Was Nellie just the style for the wife of a Baron? What if her ladyship were a blonde, such as that beautiful girl at Madame Catlin's Seminary! She would make a charming Baroness,—my, wouldn't she take the people by storm! But he did not know the Scotch people. He had not yet learned that if he should wed a homely Scotch bride, she would be three times as welcome as the most beautiful American he could import. But all this time the links in the chain were almost ready to be clinched together. Not twenty miles away, in that charming Highland country, at a retired inn on the banks of the storied Tweed, were the father and mother of that bonnie blonde American girl.

Weeks passed on. Sir Basil had been placed at rest among his ancestors in the graveyard adjoining the crumbling ivy-grown abbey. The tenantry were becoming accustomed to the young laird, with his abrupt Yankee speech, and genial air, that savored not one whit of condescension; and as the weeks wore into months, the Scotch lassies began to wonder if the young laird wouldn't

soon marry. He could have had his pick of a score of North Country girls, and invitations without number came with requests for his presence at this thing and that, that was going on among the gentry round about. Yet he still wandered fancy free, to all appearance; and enjoyed the hunting and shooting to his heart's content.

CHAPTER XVII.

HOPE CRUSHED TO EARTH.

“Fare thee well ! and if forever,
Still forever, fare thee well ! ”

NE Saturday, when the first June roses were breathing their fragrance, there came to the Fairbury post office a letter bearing many foreign postmarks. It was addressed to Miss Ellen Douglas Argyle ; but Jared gave it the closest scrutiny hoping to get an inkling of its contents through the thin rice-paper envelope, but with no avail. In fact he had not ceased his examination, when Nellie herself came in.

“Is there any mail for us, Mr. Cooper ? ”

“Yes, a furrin one. They don’t appear ’round here very often nowadays.”

Nellie blushed, but said nothing as she took the welcome letter and sauntered down the road. She was provoked at the postmaster for his hateful speech. When she got out of sight of the

office, she would read the letter. It was from Olga, anyway, she knew by the handwriting. Yes, it had been penned under the cloudless sky of storied Florence; within sight of the Pitti Palace and the Uffizi Gallery, where Olga had spent hours of earnest work. Nellie had climbed the stony road, and had reached the broad avenue, with its rows of stately maples. She could now read her letter in peace.

“ FLORENCE, May, 18—

“ DEAR NELLIE :—

How I long to be with you just for one hour, if no longer, and unburden my soul to you. Now don't start in horror, and imagine I have been doing anything so terribly wrong, for I assure you it is nothing worse than falling in love. Now you are laughing at me I know, for I am certain your sedate little head never bothers itself over the sterner sex; but I assure you I have a very severe attack of the malady called love. I can talk to you about it from here, though, and very likely if I were face to face with you I couldn't tell you so plainly, though we did use to have some lovely confidentials when we were at Madame Catlin's, didn't we, Nell? But now for the hero of my heart. Handsome is no name

for it. He is absolutely delicious. If mamma doesn't take me away from here very soon, I don't know but there will be a runaway match. He goes through the gallery every day, and once he dropped his card, accidentally of course ; and what do you suppose was on it ? You never could guess. Sir Albany Armadale ; and written in pencil on the back was the name Clyde Delamere."

At this point Nellie caught her breath. In truth, her heart stood still for several seconds, then she read on,

"The next day he lifted his hat, and the next he stood for fully fifteen earthly minutes and gazed at the painting I was copying. To tell the truth, I didn't know what to do ; but one so seldom meets acquaintances over here in this musty old country that I finally concluded I would let on that I recognized him, and then it was all over with me. He owns an enormous estate in Scotland, in fact, he is a full-fledged baron, and, by the way, a very eligible catch. He wears a beard now, which makes him look more handsome than ever, but he isn't quite as

saucy as he used to be. Now, don't be surprised to hear of my engagement some day, for he is very attentive, and I certainly think he is the handsomest man I ever saw. I haven't told you a word of the lovely views there are here; of blue sea, and glossy orange groves, and fields of sweet-faced pansies. It is a perfect lover's land; and, Nellie, I am spending such happy days. Somehow I feel as though days could never be happier, nor even quite so happy again. Give my love to your mother and father, and regards to Ralph and Leon, as well as to Dr. and Mrs. Strong.

With oceans of love,

“OLGA.

“Mizpah !”

Nellie was in a state of great internal excitement. Here was a way out of her difficulty; one she had never dreamed of. Clyde had grown cold toward her; Olga's bright beauty had captivated him; what a sense of rest and relief stole over her heart. But—she could not bear to think that this man who had made love to her, and who had gained her promise that she would be his wife, should so unceremoniously turn to

making love to Olga, without so much as bringing her into consideration. He was false at heart if he could do this thing. How did he know but that her heart was breaking by his neglect ; for she had heard nothing from him for a long time, and he had never once mentioned the fact of his having been made a baron. His love for her had been of the ephemeral kind. Would to Heaven he had something better and more pure to offer Olga.

Nellie's eyes were opened, and she saw clearly. A great burden had been lifted from her shoulders. She walked with a lighter step until she came in sight of the doctor's house. Then, like a flash, came over her Leon's devotion to Olga ; his silent love which she had helped him to bear by giving him glimpses of letters whenever she received one. How could she inflict the wound which she knew this letter would be to him. There wasn't much else in it, but this all-absorbing theme. She couldn't skip that part, and pretend to read the letter, that was certain. What was to be done ? She knew Leon was hoping for news from that source, but not news of this kind. She would wait until to-morrow and leave it with all her other troubles at the feet of the great

Burden-Bearer. And then came thoughts of humiliation. Leon would tell Ralph, and Ralph would pity her; and pity she could not bear. Anything but that from Ralph. If she read that letter to Leon, she must suffer with him in a measure; but he must not tell Ralph, not for worlds! And the folks at home! She was in a quandary.

An hour ago everything was going on as usual, and now things had turned on one of life's hinges. A door had been thrown open revealing another life; a life for a time full of perplexities and unpleasantnesses. She could see no way out, only this, she should not inform Olga of her relations with Clyde, for if Olga really loved him where was the sense in marring her happiness? and yet Clyde's infidelity rankled a little, and she could not make it out to be just right, in justice to Olga, to let it go as it was. She would see Leon first at all events. She did not read the letter again just then, and when she reached home it was laid in the little lavender-scented drawer where her foreign letters all found a resting place. The next morning Nellie's rising thoughts were of the letter, and of the ordeal which she must undergo that day. Have you ever spent a June

Sabbath in the country? Do you know what it is to feel the all-pervading solemn stillness? A hallowed quiet settles over everything. The cattle seem less restless than on a week day; while the fowls assume a more sedate air, as they serenely strut about the yard. The breath of summer breezes, stirring in the treetops, seems more gentle; while, over the wide expanse of meadows, the bright sunlight and deep cloud-shadows fall alternately on billows of waving grass, bending with harmonious movement before the fragrance-laden breeze.

She felt like sitting there and drinking in the solemn beauty of a Sabbath morning, with its warbling birds, and lowing cattle, rippling brooks, and whispering breezes, all seeming to join in one great anthem in praise of the Maker of all creation. Do you wonder that Nellie drew very near to the Creator, as she felt the hallowed stillness of the hour, and laying her head upon her clasped hands she whispered, "O Lord, I thank thee for thy goodness, and for thy watchful care over me. Guide me through this day." With that prayer on her lips, she went out to join her mother and father in the herb-scented kitchen. They were all early risers on the Sabbath, as well as on other

days. The meals were easily gotten, in order that all might go to church service all day. They walked to church on this memorable morning. A visiting clergyman was there, and preached the sermon. It was long and dry, intellectual and comprehensive, but not soul-stirring. The children hitched uneasily in their seats, rustled palm-leaf fans, and gazed longingly at the trembling branches of the great maples which grew in the churchyard. The heavy tassels on the pulpit-cushion trembled beneath the decisive blows of the preacher's fist ; but the sound was not enough to rouse two sleepers who were carrying on a trombone duet.

At length the big Bible was closed, and the last hymn sung. There was Leon in the seat with the rest of the family, and Nellie had been thinking more of him than of the sermon. She played the organ in that little church edifice, and consequently was one of the last to leave the building. It was well the hymns had been familiar ones, for her thoughts were not on her work that morning. She kept revolving in her mind how she could best break the news to Leon. For her own sake she was glad she had received the letter. For his sake she was sorry. But the moments were

speeding. The people were going, the postlude was finished. She rose to go. Ralph and Leon were sauntering slowly down the aisle. She passed them with a bow and a smile to Ralph, and the word "letter" to Leon. He stepped quickly to her side.

"When did it come?"

"Yesterday afternoon."

"Is she well?"

"Yes,"—hesitatingly—"and happy."

"That is good news. Is she ever coming back?"

"She doesn't say."

"I thought her two years abroad was up now, and she was surely coming back then."

"I am inclined to think she will stay over there."

Leon's countenance fell.

"What do you mean?"

"I don't like to tell you, Leon, but——"

"Yes, I know you promised me I should know whenever she wrote."

"That is it, Leon. I keep my promise at the risk of your happiness."

"Have you the letter with you?" His tone was altered now. He spoke with pent-up feeling.

"No, I will meet you at the Seven Giants at five this afternoon."

"Must I wait till then?" His tone was full of agony.

"Don't feel badly, Leon, perhaps I have misconstrued it a little. I read it through but once. There was something in it which brought such relief to me that I couldn't bear to read it over, content to rest on what I felt to be an open way before me. And yet," she added, "it means heart-ache for you."

"She is not engaged to some one?"

"No."

"Then, while there is life there is hope," he added with a ghost of a smile.

She left him at the corner of the street on which she lived.

"I will be at the Seven Giants at five o'clock sharp;" and, with a heart full of forebodings, he turned towards his home. Something was about to happen. He knew it as well as he knew he was walking over the gravel walk.

"Why should the going or coming of one woman affect him so," he asked himself.

From boyhood, since the Thanksgiving Day during the blizzard when Dr. Mitchell had taken

his father's place in the crimson-covered pulpit, Leon Thorpe had laid his heart at the feet of Olga Mitchell. Not in words, but in deeds, through the years that had followed, he had shown his loyalty to her many times. He had hoped much from the few words of promise he had received on that day long ago when they went skating together ; and now he felt those hopes were about to be hurled to the ground. If she had known the value of that true heart, she would not have cast it aside as something not worth having.

Leon Thorpe had attained the age of manhood, he had been graduated from college with honors. His friends were proud of him, and Olga, over the sea at the time, had, in one of her letters, expressed a personal pride in his advancement, which was more than all other compensation for his years of laborious toil. Had it been a flippant interest she had shown in him? He would not question, but await the meeting at the Seven Giants.

The hours passed very slowly to Nellie as she waited for the pointers on the old-fashioned clock in the corner to near the hour of five. She sat in the hammock on the front porch and watched for

the shadows of the row of maples to fall clear across the dusty roadway. The birds sang their sweetest melodies, but every one of them seemed to keep repeating, "I am free, I am free." What a joyful note it struck in her own heart! She felt as though a new life were opening, and already she was laying plans to go into effect in the near future. The sunlight took on a more mellow tone; the birds began to cease their carols of joy. The cows came and stood at the bars lowing gently, as the shadows of the maples grew longer, and the after-glow of an early summer's day settled over the brow of the beautiful Hanging Hills.

Nellie put on her hat and threw a fluffy white shawl over her shoulders. She knew she should need it in the shadows of the woodland. She passed slowly down the worn but narrow path, over the rail fence, and threaded her way among the wild-turnip and grass bunches that grew at the brookside. Then she came to the crossing, and, lifting her skirts, stepped daintily from one wet stone to another, unless she stood in the path on the other side. In a few moments she was in sight of the cluster of large oak trees which had been spared by the woodmen, who with still

enough of the love of nature in their hearts, forbore destroying such grand old monarchs, each measuring nearly three feet in diameter. How delightfully cool it was in that secluded spot! Leon came to meet her as he caught a glimpse of Nellie through the trees.

"I have been waiting very impatiently."

"Have you?"

"Yes. I have been in a state of misery ever since I saw you. I am anxious to learn my fate."

"Let me read you the letter, Leon; and then we can draw our own conclusions."

Leon helped Nellie to climb up over the roots of those forest monarchs, and then they seated themselves in the hollows between the giant trunks. Nellie leaned back against the rough bark, while Leon rested his head on his hand and waited. She opened the letter and read in a clear low voice. How his heart was torn as Nellie read the words "nothing worse than falling in love." That was a very bad thing to do, if one fell in the wrong direction. He smiled at the allusion to "Nellie's sedate little head." Olga evidently had never been informed regarding Nellie's love-affair, which had created quite a little stir in the village.

Olga's "severe attack of the malady" brought him back to his own heartache again.

"But now for the hero of my heart," Nellie read. Oh, how he had hoped to be that hero! How many hours he had worked on the hope of gaining an education that should enable him to give her such a home as she had been used to! If she only had verified the signs which had been evident in days agone, and which this letter was fast bringing him to believe were purely evanescent. Alas for youthful delusions! Alas for vanished hopes!

When she reached the words, "You never could guess," she paused. Her heart rose and fell with such force she was sure Leon could hear its thumpings. Oh, the exultation with which she should be able to say she was free from Clyde.

"Go on;" Leon could not wait for her to gain her breath. His face was assuming a drawn expression, as though the words she was reading were causing a severe mental strain. Affairs were taking a sad turn for him.

"Sir Albany Armadale," Nellie was reading.

A queer little smile crossed his face. "Then,

like so many other American girls, she has been won by a title."

"Clyde Delamere ;" and Nellie paused.

Leon rose to his feet and faced squarely about. "The grand rascal. Pardon me, Nellie, but I cannot help it."

"Never mind, Leon, just listen to the manner in which the friendship was renewed." Then she read on to the close. When she had finished, she dropped her hands in her lap, and looked pityingly up into Leon's face, while the great teardrops rose to the surface and rolled down her cheeks. She was giving him what she would scorn from Ralph ; and in return Leon was gazing into her face, a mixed expression upon his own. Could she mean she was glad of the release which this letter had foretold for her ? It must be, for no expression of pain crossed her features, only one of anxious pity for him alone.

"What does it mean, Nellie ?" was Leon's question, as soon as he felt he could trust himself to speak.

"Leon, you know all I know ; only I have not heard from Clyde in a long time, and this explains it to me. I had realized long ago that it was a fancy on my part ; and I am sure now it was as

far as he was concerned. What is my duty, Leon?"

"You are sure you do not care for him now?"

"As sure as I am that I am here. When I read that letter I felt as I am sure a bird does when its cage door is opened, and the bird is set free."

"Olga appears to care a good deal for him, from the tone of the letter. If he truly loves her, may she be happy, and may he be more true to her than he has been to you. Nellie, you know as well as I—I speak to you as to a sister—that letter shatters my life-hopes. God help me to live through the rest of the dreary way."

"Leon, I felt deeply for you when I first read that letter. I knew how much it meant for you as well as for me. How I shall live through the gossip which will follow the knowledge of Clyde's desertion, I do not know; but this one favor I ask, Leon. Do not tell Ralph. I could never stand his pity. Sooner or later, the news will come to the village, but what we know let us keep between ourselves. It concerns us more than any one else, and I am glad it is we alone who have the secret in our keeping."

"I will do as you desire, Nellie. I will shield your heart as I wish my own shielded."

"Is it a bargain?"

"It is! Not a soul shall know, not even my mother."

Silently they walked back to the brookside as the first bell for the young peoples' meeting rang out through the hallowed evening stillness.

"Shall you go, Leon?"

"Yes, Nellie, for help;" and she understood his meaning.

She stood at the brookside as Leon lifted his hat and started off across the meadow. How strange that the blasting of one life so often means another's happiness!

"No star goes down but shines in other skies.
The rose of sunset folds its glory up
To burst again from out the heart of dawn;
And love is never lost, though hearts run waste,
And sorrow makes the chastened heart a seer.
The deepest dark reveals the starriest hope,
And Faith can trust her heaven behind the veil."

CHAPTER XVIII.

UNVEILED BY THE NORTHERN LIGHTS.

“ And the stars in the skies, with their great wild eyes,
Peered out from the Northern Lights.”

KATIE !” The effort was followed by a hollow echoing cough, and the poor consumptive’s wasted body sank back upon the bank of white pillows. In a few weeks such a change had come over Mrs. Sharon that one would never have recognized, in that wasted shrunken form, the erect and wiry woman whom we first met in the cottage now occupied by the Deans. Quick consumption was fast carrying her beyond that bourne from whence no traveller was ever known to return. Mrs. Sharon and Katie were still at Mrs. Catlin’s. Katie, in spite of her useless feet, was one who could not be spared ; so well had she adapted herself to her position. Mrs. Sharon’s sickness had progressed so rapidly, that Mrs. Catlin had not the heart to send her to the hospital ; so Katie was

allowed to care for her mother as best she could. In response to the feeble call, Katie came at once, and her mother's hand lay in hers till she could again speak.

Then in a husky voice she said, "Katie, what time is it?"

"Just half-past nine, mother. I have but a little more mending to do and shall soon go to bed. What can I do to make you more comfortable?"

"Listen to me, Katie, and watch out of that window. Do you see those flashes of light darting through the sky? There is an awful fire somewhere, and I believe it is the world coming to an end."

"I have been watching the appearance of the sky and it grows more strange every moment."

"Katie, I want to tell you something."

"What is it, mother?"

"About the children. What is that great shaft of light that spreads over the sky? I must make haste."

Mrs. Sharon was seized with another coughing spell. Katie was quite alarmed by its severity. When it was over, Mrs. Sharon said, "Do not interrupt me in what I have to say. May I have

breath left for me to tell you all. I told you a falsehood once, Katie. I thought it would be for our good; but I have never lived an hour since without torture of mind. Mr. Dean never came for the children;—I sent them away." A deep moan escaped from Katie's lips, as she dropped her head upon her hands. Her heart seemed to stop beating.

"I was gold-greedy, Katie; I could not bear to see those jewels and the valuables go out of the house. I was a fiend for a time, Katie. I took the things you rescued from the fire. I hid them. I hired Matt to take the children away, and send them adrift. Lost children are usually picked up by the police, you know, and are either put in the asylum, or find good homes. I do not know where or how far he took them. I tell you I was a fiend,—oh! that I was ever so wicked. I know you are mourning away your heart's blood, but I must tell you, for the judgment day is coming. It is a relief for me to unburden my soul to you, Katie. I know you will hate and despise me, but the burden grows lighter. I told Matt never to show his face again. It was my doings, Katie. I sent him away. Yes, for a few paltry jewels, and a little gold, I sold my soul. Oh, I

have suffered. Remorse has eaten deeply into my vitals. I know I shall not live long, so I wanted you to know but I did not want to be on earth when the last trumpet sounded. Katie, child, can you forgive me? God knows I would undo it all if I could. Take the money and travel the world over till you find Matt. He was going for a three years' voyage. If you can find him after all these years perhaps you can hunt up the children. Mr. Dean would not care if you spent every cent to find them. Oh, it was a wicked thing to do; and may God have mercy on my soul. The valuables are in the false bottom of your wheeling-chair. The papers are in the chintz-covered foot-stool. The money is in the bank. Between the tick and the hair of the mattress, one end of it has been ripped and sewed up again, is my bank-book. I have put the money in the bank a little at a time. Be quick, Katie;" an attack of coughing was coming on; "bring a pen so I can sign the book and you can get the money."

Katie hastily found the place where the book had been inserted. She placed the pen in the shrunken fingers, but they could not close to hold it. Katie held her hand, and guided the pen, but the signature was not intelligible. The cough-

ing fit came on, and for some moments Katie waited not knowing whether she were sane or otherwise. After a time Mrs. Sharon whispered:

“Come—listen! see, the light grows brighter! It flashes clear across the sky! Katie, you have me to blame for your poor feet. I gave you medicine to keep you in bed till Matt came. You were badly burned, and I had a good excuse. I thought he would never come; but he did at last. Do you remember that April morning when you walked out into the kitchen, and I came in and found you there? Matt had been to tell me he had taken the children away, and was back for his money. I didn’t ask him where they were. He didn’t tell me. I gave him the money, and have never seen him since. Now I have told you all. I would give worlds to bring back the children. Forgive,”—then up from the depths sprang the crimson life-tide. Then with the strange weird flashing of the northern lights on that peaceful summer night, Mrs. Sharon’s spirit passed over the boundary into the unknown country.

School closed with the end of the month. The girls had made up a purse out of the remnants of their pin-money and had presented it to Katie;

but the poor girl was sick both in heart and mind. The girls thought it was all grief for her mother, but the deepest grief of all was for the two little angels set adrift in some heartless and unfriendly city. The children were only babies then, who could just lisp their pet names. Were they alive after all these years; or were they under the green daisy-strewn sod, where Katie wished she might soon be?

How vividly she could recall those dainty little beings, Angie, light-haired, blue-eyed, dimpled and angelic; Evelyn, dark-orbed, and with unruly curling brown locks! "She will have purple-black hair some day like her mother's," Aunt Eunice used to say.

Katie found herself speaking the last sentence aloud, and in the next breath she said, "I never saw any one with such purple-black hair as Mrs. Dean's, excepting some one,—I cannot think who,—unless it was Nellie Argyle."

At this time, even as Katie thought of her, Nellie's own self was in the parlor talking with Mrs. Catlin, and begging of her to allow Katie to go to Primrose Bank for a rest and a change.

"We will make it just as pleasant as we can for her, Mrs. Catlin."

The latter smiled. "I do not doubt it, Nellie; and somehow I am inclined to think it is just what she needs, an entire change; for she has been perfectly devoted to her mother, and, at the same time, has not at all neglected her other work. I will speak with her about it."

The upshot of the affair was that when Deacon Argyle went to the train to meet Nellie, he found Katie Sharon also, accompanied by her rolling-chair and foot-stool.

"Why, she wouldn't look natural without them, father," said Nellie as the deacon took them in, bag and baggage. And that night when the whippoorwill called, and the night-dew fell, Mrs. Argyle welcomed to her home another motherless girl.

CHAPTER XIX.

NELLIE'S NEW IDEA.

“I stand and wait, while all around me lies
Work that, to me, seems fitted for my hand.”



HE months were passing, and Nellie's new idea had not been put into effect. One early fall evening she sat with the rest of the family around the table in the cosy sitting-room. Nellie had seemed a little restless all day. Each one was busy that night with their own particular bit of pick-up work. Mother Argyle was knitting, Nellie was crocheting, while Katie was occupied with her favorite mending. Deacon Argyle was reading the *Weekly Sentinel*. Nellie stopped her work, and sat gazing abstractedly at the lamp. Suddenly she spoke.

“Now you are all here together, I have something to say to you.”

Every eye was turned toward her. What could be coming now?

"I am getting out of my teens, and it is time I was settling down to some sort of a life-work."

"Work?" growled the deacon, he always growled when anything did not set just right. "Hain't you work enough here, I'd like to know?"

"Well, father, I have an ambition."

"It's a bad thing for girls to have ambitions git into their heads."

"Whether you would like to have me carry it out, is another question; but I shall be greatly disappointed if I cannot do this one thing."

"What is it, daughter?"

"I want to go to the hospital and learn to be a nurse."

"Thunderation!" that was the deacon's nearest approach to swearing.

"We couldn't live without you," said Katie.

"How long have you had this in your mind, dear?" Mother Argyle questioned.

"For the past six months. My heart is set on going in this fall; and I do hope you will let me do it."

"Whatever you do, you'll do well," said the deacon, cooling down a little.

"I hope so, father. If I go, it will be with the determination of doing my whole duty. I shall not go for the sake of the money, but because I feel it is a great field for usefulness."

"So it is, my daughter, and a noble work, too; but I thought you had other plans for the future."

"I did have, but very happily for me they were frustrated as this card which I will show you tells."

She laid on the table before them a heavy white envelope on which was the coat-of-arms of a baron, the same which had been closely examined by the deacon and his wife as they sat there one evening over two years ago. Father Argyle cleared his throat as he said, "Open it, mother." It was unsealed, and on being opened proved to be an announcement card. It excited considerable comment from the deacon and his wife.

"Wall, he is a genuine scalawag. I was most afeared of him; but I thought you set so much store by him I couldn't bear to see you disappointed."

"Why, Nellie, you seem to take it very coolly, child."

"So I do, mother, and perhaps you will be glad to know that I am happy to be thus released. The only thing that irritates me is, Clyde Delamere, or rather, the Baron of Armandale, did not even consider it necessary to inform me that he wished to break the engagement; and poor Olga is utterly ignorant, as far as I know, of his having been engaged to me."

"Wall, he is a dragon for sartin, to treat any gal like that; and if I had him here I'd teach him, that I would," and the deacon stormed up and down the kitchen. There wasn't room for him to let off steam in the sitting-room; and when Father Argyle was riled he was riled.

"Never mind, father, I wouldn't marry a title, any way; I am too purely American for that; and it is a long time since I ceased to care for him. I only hope Olga and he truly love each other; but he is such a smooth-tongued gentleman one is apt to mistake admiration for love, as in my case; but the gloss has worn off as far as I am concerned. Now about my project?"

"Nellie," said the deacon, pausing in the doorway his arms akimbo, "you can do anything you are a-mind to. I give you a good long credit mark for bein' sensible in this matter, and I be-

lieve you've got some pretty good material in you, such as 'll carry you through seein' legs an' arms sawed off, and eyes gouged out, and all the rest of the *et-ceteras.*'"

"Now, father, I hardly know how to take you."

"Wall, I mean just what I say. A girl that can give up a lover like that, after all the fuss he made over you, and *vice versa*, has got considerable grit in her; and I'll help you to carry out your plan if it takes the last dollar."

"Oh, but it won't, father, I've saved nearly enough to carry me through. Of course, it is not a common occupation; but I feel as though as a nurse I could do a greater amount of good than in any other way."

"Yes, dear," and Mother Argyle's voice was tremulous in the extreme. She tried to command it but could not; and the tears rolled down the furrowed cheeks, while Nellie brushed them away, begging of her not to feel badly. But the mother-heart was full, and she had to have her cry out. It was something very unusual to see Mother Argyle in tears, but it was the thoughts of this child leaving the home which had sheltered her for so many years.

"I shall come back, mother."

"Yes, child, but when you have once gone, and have learned your trade, or whatever you call it, then you will have to go where duty calls you always; and what of the poor old father and mother, childless, when they need you so much in these later years?"

"But, mother, you and father will always have the first claim on me." Katie's heart, too, was full; too full for utterance. If she had looked up the tears would have rained down.

Nellie prepared herself for the examination, and was admitted to the hospital. Was it not a strange coincidence that about this time Ralph Strong was chosen out of a class of sixty aspiring applicants, and placed in the office of house-surgeon at the hospital where Nellie was enrolled as nurse. Call it happening if you will. To my mind nothing happens. It is all in the plan of an overruling Power. And it is that same Providence which makes one's gain another's loss; the increased happiness of one, to mean bitter pain for some one else; and so it certainly was in this case.

Olga was gone beyond the reach of Leon Thorpe, but his whole heart had gone out to her, and it could never return to be given to any one

else. He realized the blight which had fallen upon his young life, and manfully strove to hide it. He busied himself with his books; he studied early and late; he strove in all ways which suggested themselves to a pure and upright nature to subdue this clamorous love which was slowly absorbing his life. He seldom heard anything regarding Olga now. Nellie was busy with her training, but occasionally found time to write him a few lines, though she seldom mentioned Olga, except once to say, "I had a letter from Olga the other day, she is travelling in Italy now"; and again, "Olga is on her way to her Highland castle, she says in her last hurriedly written letter." No more tidings as to whether she was happy, nor in fact any particulars whatsoever.

So the days and weeks and months monotonously sped on at Westbridge. But across the water time was telling. While Nellie kept up her daily routine, or alone with the sick and dying paced to and fro in her ward through the long watches of the night, our gay, light-hearted Olga was assuredly learning her lessons in training for a service which lay only a little farther along on her heretofore flower-strewn pathway. While Nellie daily felt how great was the field opening

before her, how quickly she must work to get in all that was possible in a ~~day~~ with very few spare moments in it ; Olga's life was narrowing down to a focus which must be arrived at ere she could look beyond—even one little hour.

CHAPTER XX.

A CHAPTER OF INCIDENTS.

“They say they love us, perhaps they do,
In a masculine way, as they love their wine ;
But the soul of a woman needs something more,
Or it suffers at times, like mine.”



HE heather was in full bloom and was purpling the downs, when Sir Albany took home his American bride. It was not long before she had won her way into the hearts of all in the neighborhood, and many an old heart “greeted sair for the bonnie lassie brought far from home and friends, and set high up on the crags in the gloomy old castle.” Olga did not mind it for a time, as long as Clyde was so very attentive ; but as months passed on, his ardent love cooled, and many a time when he returned from hunting trips were the wee wife’s eyes bathed in tears. He poohed at her ; called her a crybaby ; and gave sundry other appellations which appeared very hateful indeed to the

poor child who was only home-sick, and hungry for a little mothering. With so much time on her hands Olga turned to her painting, and as the months went by she conceived an odd fancy.

At the time of her marriage a strange truth had come to light, one which she had often imagined, but had been led to believe was not true. Dr. and Mrs. Mitchell had, until that time, seen fit to keep it a secret that Olga was an adopted daughter; and the newly-gained knowledge had kept her brain in a constant whirl and tumult of query. Since that knowledge the face which she had laughingly asserted to Nellie haunted her, had done so in very truth, for some way she associated it with her earliest years. The fancy grew into a fixed purpose, and procuring a small canvas, she set about the task of transferring to it the face which hung over her whether she were awake or sleeping. She had never told Clyde of this fancy of hers, for it was to her a sacred thought, one never breathed to either father or mother, who, now that she was married, left her alone in her new home; while they, after a few weeks' stay with her, went on in their search of pleasure, freed from the care of a child which was not their own. Left alone so much, she devoted

her spare time to this self-imposed task ; although moments and hours of needed rest were also spent upon the finest and daintiest of needlework.

One morning, as they sat at breakfast, Sir Albany looked at the wee wife, and for the first time noticed how pinched and pale she was looking. His heart gave a strange little twinge of remorse as he thought of how much he had neglected her of late, for the shooting had been fine, and the birds quite gamey. He would try and spend a little more time with her that very afternoon. As he left the breakfast room he gave her cheeks a little pinch, as he lifted her face to his for a good-bye kiss, remarking, "I am afraid you are embroidering too much, little girl ; you must not work quite so hard. I shall be home a little earlier to-day, so don't get too tired out." She rewarded him with one of her old smiles, and with a light heart went about her labor of love.

Tiring of sewing, after a little, she put the dainty work aside and went to the little room in an out of the way turret of the old castle, a cosy little nook which she had chosen as a studio. Clyde paid very little attention to such work nowadays. He was too much wrapped up in the shooting. He did not even know she was paint-

ing. Most likely, under existing circumstances, he would have forbidden it entirely; but as he did not know, the wee wife worked on. She was fast gaining the expression she had striven so hard to obtain. The kindly dark eyes were gazing at her from the wet canvas. She was sitting with her brush in her hand, her mind away back in bygone years, trying so hard to connect that face with something of the past, but without avail. She had not quite come back to the present when her dreaming was disturbed. Sir Albany was speaking. He stood in the doorway, his blanched face in strong contrast with the darkness of the passage.

“Indeed, my lady, and who might this lover be?” He had asked no questions, and his words were an accusation. The demon Jealousy had seized him, and the old dragon blood was aroused. She did not move, for his words chilled her to the heart. He made a move toward the picture, saying, “Speak, woman, before I destroy the proof of your perfidy. By the bones of the dragon, but you must do well to paint such a speaking face from memory.” His words were full of irony, while his dark eyes almost flashed fire.

Olga had never seen this side of his nature, but

it cut her to the quick. She arose and stood before him in all her womanly dignity. Her face was blanched, but not with fear ; the deer was at bay.

“Clyde Delamere,” and her voice was low and intense, “dare to destroy that picture, dare to even mar it, and by the quivering little life which will some day own you its father, I charge you, Dragon of Armadale, you will rue it. You dare to make insinuations! Look at your own life and see who has cause for jealousy. As for that face, it is one that has haunted me, haunts me yet ; who it is I do not know, only this, that wherever I turn I see that face, and paint it I will, though all the demon dragons of Armadale swoop down on this ill-fated castle. You have feigned to love me, but love is not in your nature. You are a fascinator ; a fiend, dragon-like seeking whom you may devour. I am at your mercy, I say it, at the mercy of my husband : and shame upon you that you dare to insult me, I, your wife, and the mother of your unborn child. I pray that no calamity overtake you before you beg forgiveness for having judged me with such terrible injustice.”

She raised her hand to her head, reeled back-

ward, and sank insensible at the feet of the conscience-stricken man.

“God forgive me! I have killed her!” His anger was gone, he knew she had spoken only the truth.

If she would only speak, just to say she forgave him; but there she lay white and cold, with the blood settling in the hollows of her face. He took her in his arms and staggered under the heavy burden till he laid her on a couch in her own apartment. Then he rang for Jean, and left the room as soon as the woman came. She bathed the white face and rubbed the stiffened limbs, all the while talking in her own motherly way. “My puir wee bairn. I thocht he wad be the deith o’ her ane o’ these days. My puir wee girl, she could na stand it; she war that nearvous. She war too muckle tried, my wee girl was. It is he that has killed her; wae tae him, wae, wae!” and so old Jean mourned as she chafed the cold hands and bathed the marble-like brow. After a time the eyelids quivered, and a convulsive movement showed that life was not extinct. In another hour she had regained partial consciousness, but the strain had been too much for the poor little mother-elect. Before the dawn of the mor-

row's sun a new life had sprung into being, and Olga for the first time had experienced the pangs of motherhood. For days and weeks her life hung on a thread, as did also the little life summoned before its time; but God is merciful, and in his goodness spared them both. Old Jean had a very tender spot in her heart for both of them; and she did everything she could think of to bring a little color to the too pale cheeks.

But through all these anxious days where was Sir Albany? His conscience was a very uncomfortable thing to possess about this time. He was sure Olga would hate him if she were alive, and she must be, or he would have heard if anything dreadful had happened. And if she were to hate him what was the use of going back, so he might as well go away and stay. So he travelled on while weeks grew into months. He went as far as Florence, and there went over the ground he and Olga had gone over in their days of love-making; and every step he took made him hate himself more and more. What a brute he had been, all too undeserving of such a treasure as he now realized his wife to be. Oh, why had he allowed the dragon Jealousy to gain possession of him!

He went on to Venice where they had spent some days during their first newly-wedded happiness. Oh, if those days would only come back again, how differently he would do! He hailed a gondolier one evening, and was soon gliding over the moonlit waves, he reclining alone among the luxurious cushions. If Olga were only there, and had forgiven him; but better still, if the harsh words had never been said! The music came softly, sweetly out to him while the countless gay lights from cornices and roofs, and even from the water's edge, were reflected in silver and gold in the ripples of the lagoon. High up along the balconies he could see the flaming torches flickering, while all around the lagoon were the white faces and dark forms of the people looking down on the beautiful scene. In the distance he saw the shimmering multi-colored waters; and heard the gurgling murmur of the fountains. How differently it had sounded when Olga was there; now he could take no pleasure in it. At a sign from Sir Albany, the stoical gondolier dexterously swung his gondola to the water's edge, and Clyde was soon in his hotel getting ready to start for home. He could stand it no longer. All the old passion had been aroused by this hasty visit to a place

so closely associated with Olga. He would go back to her, and beg the forgiveness she alone could grant.

When once headed for home, it seemed that the creeping railway trains would never get to Calais. Over the channel, and up through the rugged Scotch country, the journey took days which seemed interminable ; and after all, if she were still alive, how would she receive him ? He had been gone so many months, there had been time for a good deal to happen. Poor Olga ! her period of convalescence was lengthy and tedious. All alone in the old castle, with no companion save Jean and the wee baby, how slowly the time dragged on ! Olga still remained weak and weary, nothing that was done seeming to be of any avail. She wrote to her mother at length, and after a time she came. She sat in Olga's room one evening, soon after her arrival, engaged in conversation.

“ You say you have never heard from him ? ”

“ No, not one word ! I have no more idea than you where he is. If I stay here I shall go crazy. I must get away somewhere ; but where can I go with this little lamb ? ”

“ You might leave her with Jean and go with us

for a time. It will never do for you to drag her around with you ; and you will never get well in this gloomy place."

"Oh, mother, I cannot, cannot leave my baby. Dear little life, if she should die I should never forgive myself."

"But, Olga, you must not look at it in that way. If you do not go you will never get well, I am afraid ; so which is the better way to do ? You surely would rather leave her with Jean for a few months, than to have to leave her entirely."

"You are right, mother ; I will think of it, but it seems very hard, but Jean will be good to her, I know ; I could not leave her in better hands."

So it was arranged that the little Alma, as Olga had named her, should be cared for by old Jean. The night before their departure had come, and Olga alone with the child in her room, rocked and crooned over her. There was no light there excepting that thrown by the flickering of the burning logs in the chimney-place.

"My dear little treasure bird ;" and she held the wee form close to her breast, her lips touching the soft little ringlets which clustered about the sweet baby face. "My own little love, is

it wicked for me to leave you? How mamma loves to cuddle you close in her arms, and to feel your baby fingers, and hear your soft cooing, and watch your wondering eyes studying her face! I wonder if I were my mother's own child, if she would ask me to part with you? It is like stopping the beating of my heart to even think of letting you go. We may be gone six months, may be more, and what a big girl you will be then! Oh, my little Alma, perhaps you will never see me again!" Her frame shook as she sobbed over the little one, who looked up into her face and smiled. Then she calmed herself and went on. "Yes, my little daughter, perhaps I shall leave this world of trouble, leave my precious one to grow up to battle with the temptations and troubles of life, but I leave you in the care of my heavenly Father, and he will never forsake you. I have not done as much for him as I ought. I have been gay and frivolous; but it was my nature. If I am spared, I will try and do more for him who has blessed me with such a treasure to keep for him. Yes, little one, 'when thy father and mother forsake thee, then the Lord shall take thee up.' And, darling, if I never see you again, if I reach first that beau-

tiful home called heaven, God permitting, mother will come back to this world of trouble to be a watchful guardian ever at your side ; helping you in time of sorrow, shielding you from every harm. Oh, if you were only a little older ! Your father may come back some day, sometime. If he only knew that when your little form first lay in my arms, all the old love came back, all the unkind words were forgiven, all the dark past was forgotten in that new found bliss. But he cannot know, he cannot know." And then the little one was laid in her bed the last time that mother should lull her to sleep, while the babe was such a helpless wee one.

When the morning came, there was a sad, sad parting between mother and child ; but the grandmere's stronger will prevailed, and old Jean was left behind with the little Alma, while Olga and her mother went in search of health and strength among the mountains of Switzerland. Months had gone by, when there came a letter from Jean that sent terror to the heart of the young mother, and sore were her upbraidings of self.

" MY DEAR MISTRESS :

" I kenna what to do. The Maister is come

agen, and tells me that I maun tak the wee one and gae 'long wi' him to America. I am sair tried, but wha' can I do agen the faither of the bairn ? I wad hae ye come richt awa' hame, for we maun be on oor way by anither week.

“ JEAN MACDUFF.”

Olga was prostrated by the news. They had never thought of such a thing as that happening. All they could do was to take the next train for home. If Jean had only telegraphed ; but she probably had not thought of such a thing. Where could he be going with the child ? If he took old Jean with him she would keep them informed ; but supposing Sir Albany took it into his head to employ another nurse ? How Olga prayed that she might get back to Armadale before the departure for America ! As fast as the slow trains would carry them, they travelled back to the cottage where Alma had been left. They arrived at the station and drove at once to Jean's home.

Olga burst into the room, and there in a low chair sat the faithful old servant crooning a soft lullaby over the beautiful little girl, who slept with her plump white arms twined about the old

woman's neck. Olga sank on the floor before them, and burying her face in the child's lap, sobbed out her joy. The baby slowly opened her eyes, and looked wonderingly at Olga, then up into old Jean's face.

"Don't you know your mother, darling? This is mother come back to you, precious one. How foolish I was ever to leave you!" But the little one clung all the closer to Jean, and looked over her shoulder at this strange woman who was making such an ado over her.

Then Olga cried tears of true grief; for she really expected the child would remember her, but it did not. After a little coaxing with her watch and gold beads, she persuaded the child to come to her, then, with the babe safely in her arms, she ventured to ask, "Where is Sir Albany?"

"Aweel, Mistress, we were to tak' the steamer the day, but the Lord prevented it. May the gude God and the kirk forgive me if I prayed an evil prayer, but I thocht it a sair shame to be after whiskin' the wee bairn out o' its ain countree athout a sight o' its mither's face for so long a time; and sae I said, Dear Lord, forgive me for askin', but if it be not agen thy will, prevent the

Maister fra takin' the bairn before its mither comes, e'en if thou hast to lay him low."

Then she leaned forward and said in a hushed voice, "He answered that prayer last nicht. The Maister was comin' fra the town, and was gallopin' up the rocky way to the castle, when in some way or ither the horse threw him and brak' his leg. And Donald heard the horse come tearin' hame athout the Maister, and it was then he sat out to luik for him and found him lyin' there groanin'. They took him to the castle and got the doctor and he set the bone and bandaged him up weel and said he was gude for sax weeks on that bed. But ne'er you mind, bairn, the gude Lord's hand struck him doon, or we wad hae been out on the deep, and you left here greetin' sair." Olga sat still and white as she listened to old Jean. It was months since she had seen her husband; they had then parted in anger; and when he came back and found her gone he decided at once to take the baby away. But had she not left it with Jean? How she blamed herself for that! In truth she had blamed herself for months; but her mother had kept her from thinking she was doing aught so very wrong. Now she was back again, how she longed

for all the intervening days to be lived over again, that she might spend them with her baby, and watch the budding blossom open! Poor Sir Albany! Her wifely heart had long ago forgiven his cruel words, but pride kept her from wishing to seek him, for was not his the greater fault? Now he was ill, and all alone in the old castle; with its dark halls and walls with musty hangings, for it had been closed all this long while. Mrs. Mitchell had found comfortable quarters at the Armadale Inn; and now the coach of that establishment stood at the door ready to convey Olga thither.

“Come, Jean, with me.” Olga carried the child herself. She could not bear to allow it to leave her arms. The trio entered the carriage, and Olga said, “To the castle.” The driver turned in that direction, and slowly the lumbering coach rolled up the rocky road. Jean pointed out the spot where Sir Albany was thrown, and then in a few moments they were at the castle gate.

It was with mingled emotions that she entered the doorway. The old love said, “Your place is here;” but pride answered, “Go back to the inn. He left you, and it is his place to seek you.”

Then love responded, "He left you here and expected to find you here;" so between love and pride poor Olga was in sore distress. She had come with a heart full of a fear that the child would be gone; but Providence had aided her. She would go to her rooms and think over what was the best thing to do. With a heart full of strange emotions she entered her own apartments. They were just as she had left them, cleanly and well ventilated. She would just take a glance at Sir Albany before she ventured to enter the room, and carry out the resolution that was fast forming in her mind. She stepped to the heavy curtained doorway and noiselessly slid the door open. There he lay at length, quiet and ghastly, his head bandaged about with white, and his face almost as colorless as the bandages.

What a contrast to the handsome and faultlessly attired Clyde Delamere of old! A great pity swelled her heart, and then like a clutch at her throat came the thought that on that day he had fully intended to be on his way to America with her baby. Yes, he had meant to take little Alma, and leave her behind, with the broad Atlantic rolling between them. Then the thought came, "What if he should die?" and the old love

tugged unmercifully at her heart-strings. He moved and moaned. She drew back still further into the friendly shadow of the curtains. She would not have him see her for worlds just now. Old Donald watched near him, and the instant a move was made he was at the sick man's side.

“Donald!” it was a weak voice which spoke, weak and husky, and one hand groped about as if feeling to know if any one were near. The faithful old man signified his presence.

“Service, my lord.”

“Who is here?”

“No one.”

“I thought it was my wife. I felt her breath upon my hand. I could swear to it.”

At that instant Olga would have rushed to his side but prudence forbade.

“Do not excite yourself, my lord. We can send for her if you wish.” Now she should learn whether he would be pleased to see her. She listened breathlessly. So much depended on what he should say, but oh, perverseness of fate, or contrariness of human nature. He was making reply:

“I don't know that I care to see her, particularly.”

It had cooled his ardor to come home and find her gone.

“Dinna fash yourself, sir. How soon could you stand seein’ her?”

“I tell you I don’t want to see her. If it hadn’t been for this confounded accident she wouldn’t have stood much chance of seeing me very soon.”

“Tut, tut, sir; I’ve told you over and over it was her mither that persuaded her to leave the bairn.”

“That’s all right. I can take care of it when I get over this.”

Those words capped the climax. Instead of being humbled by the calamity which had befallen him, the perverse side of his nature had been aroused. If he was in that spirit, though he was ill, he did not care to see her; and it were better that she should go and let him seek her if he so desired. She turned sadly back to her room, little thinking that, as a sick one often will, the wretched man had said precisely what he did not mean; it being only a bit of bravado to bluff old Donald. If he had but known that she heard!

With a sinking heart, the poor little wife re-

gretfully picked up a few of her most treasured belongings. When all was in readiness for her departure she stepped back to the doorway and took a last glance at Clyde. He was not seriously ill, though his wound would require time for healing; he was still angry with her, and did not wish to see her, and last and most important of all, he still thought of taking away the baby. Then sadly, with a great load in her breast, and a feeling as though iron hands were clutching her heart, she turned away from the room and made haste to get back to the inn. She could not trust even Jean with the child now, for she did not know what might come to pass. Mrs. Mitchell advised her to take the next steamer for America; and in a very short time she was on her way, her mind in a state of great excitement. Her only thought was to get the child to a hiding-place of safety; and what more restful harbor could she go to than Primrose Bank?

CHAPTER XXI.

KATIE INTERVIEWS AUNT EUNICE.

“ Oh, breaking heart that will not break ;
Oh pale, pale face, so sweet and meek ;
What wantest thou ? Whom dost thou seek ? ”



THE apple trees spread delightfully cool shadows over the front grass and down the sloping green grade to the dusty road. Up by the house, where the gnarled old trees spread their broad limbs, was hung a hammock, and there one pleasant afternoon Katie Sharon lay enjoying a siesta. Mrs. Argyle had helped her into the comfortable seat, and had left her with a book.

“ You haven’t been like yourself the last few weeks, and you must get out of doors more ; ” had been Mrs. Argyle’s parting solicitous remark.

How Katie wanted to ask Mrs. Argyle’s advice, but it was such a hard matter to explain ; there were the dead as well as the living involved, and the more she thought of it, the more she

felt as though she was the most to blame for having taken the children to her home instead of to Mrs. Van Alstyne's. But what better could she have done with her heavy burden, and smarting burns, and anxiety and fright blended together? The more she thought of it, the harder it seemed to find a way out; and then no one knew what changes might have taken place, so many years had gone by. As Katie lay there dozing and thinking, she heard a step coming up the walk, but her position was so comfortable, and she was so nearly asleep, that she could not bear to move and drive away the delightful sensation of perfect rest which was stealing over her.

After a time a carriage passing rapidly aroused her, and she awoke with the thoughts of the children, and the unperformed duty which ever stared her in the face. Then, as she had done hundreds of times before, she breathed a prayer that the way might be opened to lead her in the right direction very soon. As she fell to thinking again of her present surroundings, she caught the sound of a voice from one of the sitting room windows. It was strangely familiar. Then it came again. She wondered where she had heard it before. The voice approached the door. The

owner evidently was about to depart. As Mrs. Argyle threw open the blind door, she said, "Drop in often, Miss Stiles, we shall be glad to have you for a neighbor."

Katie swung around to an erect sitting posture, in order to view the figure coming down the path. A choking sensation came into Katie's throat, and she felt a sudden pain in the region of her heart. "Aunt Eunice?" The voice quavered a little, and then came a flood of tears. Her opportunity had arrived, but where had Miss Stiles come from? She was the last person on earth she had expected to see at that moment.

How like many of us, was Katie. We pray earnestly for some desired object, and when our prayer is answered, we are as much astonished as though we had never asked. Ah, how lax is our faith! The lady in turn was startled by being thus addressed, for it was years since any person other than Mr. or Mrs. Dean had called her by that name.

"Was it you who called me, miss?" as she approached the sobbing form.

The girl held up her tear-stained face and said, "Do you not know me? I beg pardon for not rising, but I cannot walk."

Eunice Stiles looked anxiously into the scarred face, and shook her head. "No, you have the advantage of me, my dear; but what can I do for you? Mrs. Argyle told me there was a young lady making her home here, but when she came to call you, you were asleep and she thought she would not disturb you."

"Don't you remember Katie Sharon?"

"Why, certainly I do, but——"

"I am Katie Sharon."

"That is impossible, for Katie was lost with the children years ago."

"Aunt Eunice, as God is my Judge, I am that Katie; and these scars on my face are the result of that fire. Alarm number sixty-three for months rang in my ears, sleeping or waking. And the children—God knows I saved them with the jewels at the risk of my own life."

"Then where are they now?"

Aunt Eunice had risen by this time and excitedly seized Katie by the shoulder.

"That I cannot tell you, but if I had not stopped to save them, I should not have had these scars, neither should I have spent months on a bed of pain."

"You speak in riddles. You say you saved the

children and some valuables, yet have never let it be known. You must unfathom these mysteries, for you make yourself liable for a very grave offence, Mr. Dean would say."

"Where can I find him?"

"We expect him home to-night."

"Then to-night I will see Mr. Dean if he will call here, for I am in no condition to go to him. Had it not been for my crippled condition I should have searched for him as soon as I knew, but the work was done too well."

"As soon as you knew what?"

"Did I not tell you? It is only a very short time since I found the children had not been restored to their parents."

Aunt Eunice groaned aloud. "Girl, that mother nearly died over the loss of those children. Her mind has never been entirely right since then; and their father grew gray on that terrible night. We have only lately come to Westbridge to see what a change of this sort will do. We have been to the shore, and to the mountains, North, South, East and West; but all is of no avail. Why, I so wonder, have you never let people know you were alive?"

"Miss Stiles, bring Mr. Dean to me; I would

crawl to them on my hands and knees if I could, and tell them both the unbroken story. It has almost killed me since I have known all ; but I did not know which way to turn, so many years have gone by."

"I will bring Reginald Dean with me if he comes home to-night, or my name is not Eunice Stiles ;" and she walked hastily down the path to the road. Katie was completely unnerved. She felt as though her heart would burst, and insensibility kindly came to her relief. When the dew fell Mrs. Argyle went to help her into the house, and found an inanimate form. Then consternation and dread filled the house at Primrose Bank.

CHAPTER XXII.

MR. DEAN HEARS KATIE'S STORY.

"Though much is taken, much abides; and tho'
We have not now that strength which in old days
Moved earth and heaven; that which we are, we are;
* * * * *
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield."



UNT EUNICE hurried down the path and along the dusty road to ward home. She forgot to hold up her skirts as she walked through the grass, and over the hard-trodden path at the roadside where the little white daisies grew thickly in the sand, and the wee rust-colored butterflies alighted and dodged and fluttered by the score. What a strange tumult raged in her breast; mingled hope, fear, scorn, and a dreadful feeling of mystery hanging over all. A telegraph messenger met her with a fateful yellow envelope. She tore it open and read, "Will be home to-morrow. R. Dean."

She must wait another whole day in suspense, and the girl who called herself Katie Sharon

would be in suspense too. She could not have it so. Then, to the boy, "Take your pencil and write on the back of that telegram, for my hand is too shaky to-day, 'Come as quickly as possible. News of Katie Sharon ;' and see that it goes at once." The boy did as directed and the message was soon speeding over the wires. When the midnight express came in, Reginald Dean was on board. Pale with excitement, cold with anxiety, he hurried home. Aunt Eunice was up and waiting for him, and in a few moments told him what she could. The hours until daybreak seemed interminable, but the cold gray blue of dawn softened under the roseate shafts of light, the morning star grew dim, and the mists in the valley rolled away.

As soon as practicable after day was ushered in, they bent their steps toward Deacon Argyle's. Mrs. Argyle was surprised to see them and still more so to hear them ask for Miss Sharon. Then the clouds on her face grew darker. "Poor Katie is very sick. She has been in a raging fever ever since she came out of the stupor in which I found her yesterday afternoon. You remember, Miss Stiles, when you were here she was asleep. Shortly after you left for home I

went to help her into the house and found her on the ground insensible. In her delirium she calls for Mr. Dean, and talks wildly about the children, and alarm number sixty-three. We are at a loss to understand the cause of it."

"Have you had the doctor?"

"Oh, yes, he is afraid of brain fever, and says the cause is probably some trouble unknown to us, over which she has been brooding."

They had entered the house and already were in Katie's room. She tossed uneasily and murmured, "Oh, how have I time to save all. The smoke chokes me so." Then she turned again and groped blindly about. Mr. Dean looked eagerly into the scarred face, then turning to Mrs. Argyle, said, "That girl must be brought back to reason at any expense. I believe she holds the key to a terrible fatality which occurred in my family some years ago. We have searched for this woman for years, but had given up all hope of ever seeing her again. We believed her to be dead. You can do us no greater favor than by doing for her all in your power, Mrs. Argyle."

"I should do that anyway, Mr. Dean. Katie was very much attached to my daughter at

school ; and for her sake, as well as Katie's, she will receive the best of care."

"Would you object to having a trained nurse for her?"

"Not in the least. My daughter is now in training at the hospital."

"I will consult with Doctor Strong and see about sending for her."

Then he sadly turned away, but one hope still remained. He should be able to learn a little of the fate of the children ; he should know where they were buried, probably, if nothing more. Nellie was sent for and all her skill was put in force conjointly with the doctor's to gain victory over the fever which was raging so fiercely in that weary body. As much anxiety was experienced at Mr. Dean's as at Primrose Bank. Messengers frequently passed back and forth between the houses. One day Mr. Dean went to the door in answer to a ring. It was Nellie who had brought the message, while out for her daily airing. Mr. Dean started as he beheld her face. Where had he seen her before ? She delivered her message and was gone while he was collecting his scattered senses. He stepped back into the sitting-room to speak with Aunt Eunice.

“ Did you see that lady ? ”

“ Yes, it was Mrs. Argyle’s daughter, the nurse. Isn’t she a beautiful girl ? ”

“ Is she their own daughter ? ”

“ Why, yes, for all I know. I’ll ask Hester when I see her,—and now come to think of it, Hester did say she was adopted.”

“ Doesn’t she make you think of Ethel in her younger days ? ”

“ The resemblance is certainly very striking.”

With careful nursing, and judicious treatment, a day came when the fever subsided, and the poor racked body began to mend ; though it was weeks before she was strong enough to stand an interview with Mr. Dean. Then gently and quietly he sat and listened as she told him the whole story, she living again through those hours, from the moment when she noticed the first smell of smoke, her search for fire, the bursting of flames through the beautiful polished floors, her removal of the children to her own home only a few blocks away, and the safe deposit there of the jewels and box of valuables which always stood in the little *escritoire*. Over and over again she paused to give vent to the tears which, in her weak condition, lay very near

the surface. Then she told him of the hiding-place, told him how she had sat for years in that chair, her poor feet resting on that footstool, never dreaming but that her mother had told her the truth ; resting secure in the thought that the children had been restored to their parents while she lay on her couch unconscious for weeks, and still resting in that belief through the years that followed until that memorable night when, under the weird flashing of the northern lights, her mother had made the confession which still remained so much of a mystery.

Then she watched Mr. Dean as he searched for the treasures. She had never had the heart to do so herself. He brought them to light much as one would open along-closed casket to look upon the face of the long-ago dead. There were the papers and jewels, proof positive that this woman was the genuine Katie. Then she produced the bank books, with the interest due on them since a short time before her mother's death. Mr. Dean sat back in his chair, passing his hand over his white forehead, and through the white locks of hair. This was a case such as he had never before heard of ; and to him it seemed that the first thing to do was to search

through all the orphan asylum records in the country. Then Katie said, "Oh, if I could only hear from Matt!"

Mr. Dean jumped from his chair as a great light dawned upon him. "Is Matthew Sharon your brother?"

"Yes, but I have not seen or heard from him since I was at your house; excepting as I have told you."

Katie had inadvertently called him "my brother," all through the narrative. Mr. Dean left the room without another word. He walked out of the house as though treading on air; on and on he went straight toward home and out into the barn and garden to find Matt. When he stood before him his first question was, "Matt, have you a sister?" Mr. Dean's face was strangely white and his voice strangely hollow.

Matt slowly shook his head, "Not that I remember, Mr. Dean." "Think again, Matt. Try very hard to remember your sister Katie." Matt put his hand to his head, and racked his brain, but the old memory could not be aroused.

"Do you remember the children?"

Matt started as though an electric shock had

passed through him ; his face lighted up,—he was about to speak. “ Yes, I remember,”—then his face clouded over, the vision on memory’s walls had vanished, and the past was as blank as before.

“ My head,” said Matt, “ Oh, it won’t let me think. There was something, but it has all gone,—all gone ! ” and he turned to his work again.

“ The cruel fates are against me ; ” and Reginald Dean turned away. A carriage-load of young people was coming down the road. What caused them to start a song as they approached Rose Cliff, and why was the song which floated to Reginald Dean’s ears the sweetly sad refrain of “ Home, Sweet Home ? ” He turned back to Matt. The song had awakened memories by the score. This mystery must be unfathomed, he must probe still deeper. “ Come, Matt, with me.” Matt obeyed. “ Go, man, to your room, shave, put on your best clothes and make yourself look as young as possible. Report to me as soon as you are ready. I will await you in the study.”

Matt wondered what was in the air. Something unusual, surely. Mr. Dean impatiently walked the floor,—the moments seeming hours.

They both reached the deacon's before Mr. Dean had thought of the danger which such a step might cause to Katie. He first saw Mrs. Argyle and Nellie, briefly stating his hope that Matt was Katie's brother. He would try and break the knowledge of his presence as gently as possible. Mrs. Argyle and Nellie had all sorts of surmises as to Mr. Dean's visits and interviews, but had refrained from asking any questions. This was to them a partial solution; but what could it have to do with this past trouble of Mr. Dean's? Perhaps they should learn in time. At any rate they would keep quiet about it; for, as Mrs. Argyle said, "A still tongue makes a wise head." Mr. Dean was a lawyer, and law was queer business, and it was no more strange that he should find a clue to a case among their friends than among other people; though of course it was a little exciting, after all. But he kept his own counsel.

Katie had never spoken of her brother, and no one ever thought of Matt, as any one but Matt. He was known by that name to all the villagers, and it is doubtful if half a dozen people knew he had a surname.

Mr. Dean entered Katie's room quietly and

alone. She sat just where he had left her, a short time before. She seemed surprised to see him return so quickly, and her eyes sought his face as though she would read there the reason for this interview. He seated himself beside her and, in a calm soothing tone, addressed her. "Katie, I once knew a man who was a sailor. His name was Matthew Sharon. He was hurt on his last voyage by a falling spar, and the blow on his head impaired his memory. It is possible that he is your brother. Could you bear it to see him soon? He is at present in my employ, and I could bring him here to see you in a few moments,—in fact, now, if you so desire."

"Bring him to me."

Then Mr. Dean opened the door and admitted Matt. They studied each other's faces closely. "It is I, Matt. Don't you know sister Katie? Am I so scarred, then, that you do not know me?" She looked pleadingly into the man's face. He did not appear to recognize her.

"Oh, Matt, it is you, I know. What did you do with the children?"

Again that light in his face. "Oh, yes, I remember;" and then that vacant, distressed look, and the hand passed over his brow. Then,

“ It’s no use, I can’t think ; ” and he looked helplessly at Mr. Dean.

“ Katie, are you sure this is your brother ? ”

“ It is my brother Matt, but what can we do ? He cannot tell us anything ; ” and poor Katie wept bitter tears.

“ Perhaps he will be able to in time. It may come to him. Don’t cry, child, I am sure you have done what you could.”

And this from Mr. Dean. How kindly he was dealing with her, and she had so dreaded an interview with him. But Mr. Dean would not be thwarted in this manner. He had had cases before this, where apparently impregnable barriers had arisen before him, and he had hewn them down ; and in this case he would not be nonplussed. Though a mystery of mysteries, it must be solved. Far into the night Reginald Dean sat and thought, racking his brain. The next day passed in like manner, walking the floor, sitting with his head in his hands, or with his eyes closed as he sat thinking ; thinking, always thinking on this question of vital importance, and not a word of it breathed indoors for fear Mrs. Dean might hear.

The next afternoon as Aunt Eunice and Mrs. Dean sat out in the summer-house, enjoying as

much as they could of the beautiful summer sunshine falling in flecks through the lattice and between the sprays of trumpet-creeper that twined and climbed about the sides and roof of the cosy little place, she picked up one of the latest magazines and then cut the leaves with her scissors. Reginald had been so busy he had neglected to perform this little act in which he always took so much pleasure. As her glance rested on the page, she read, "Some Late Wonderful Medical Achievements." She read on. Then she glanced over the top of her book at Mrs. Dean, who was sleeping and resting comfortably.

Aunt Eunice arose slowly and walked softly toward the house, the book at her side and her finger between the pages. She stepped to the study door and rapped.

"Come in."

She entered, opened the book before Mr. Dean and placed her finger on the title of the article she had been reading; then went back to her charge in the summer-house. Reginald read the article through, arose, put on his hat, and with the book in his hand, turned toward Dr. Strong's, saying to himself as he did so, "Trust a woman for common sense."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE MYSTERY UNRAVELLED.

“ In the high wet grass went the path to hide,
And the low wet leaves hung over ;
But I could not pass upon either side,
For I found myself, when I vainly tried,
In the arms of my steadfast lover ;
And he held me there, and he raised my head,
While he closed the path before me ;
And he looked down into my eyes and said,—
How the leaves bent down from the boughs o'erhead,
To listen to what my lover said !
Oh, the leaves hanging lowly o'er me ! ”



LOWLY the moon rose behind the leafy branches of the maples and birches, casting its shimmering gleams over the dew-laden grass. The scent of mignonette, honeysuckle, and other summer blossoms, blended with the odor of new-mown hay, lifted one on wings of air over and above the things of earth, plain commonplaces of every-day life. Down the broad avenue, under those low branching trees, before them the rising moon,

around them the scent of summer flowers all the more subtle in the uncertain glow of evening, moved two forms slowly and thoughtfully. It had been a day of anxiety, a day on whose moments hung weal or woe; hope or despair, for several people.

Arm in arm, keeping step to the chirping of the crickets and the katydids, now under the shadow, and again in the full gleam of the moonlight slanting from a halo of brown-tinted clouds, a bright and beautiful portal widening and widening until earth-dwellers seemed to stand upon the threshold of the moon world. Such a calm and stillness pervaded the atmosphere that one's heart seemed almost to cease beating; such a holy sense of rest, as of one being lifted heavenward, and the passing of the day, had led these two into this state of hallowed expectancy. They were both waiting for something about to happen, and that sense of nearness which steals over one at such moments seemed pervading the air, causing one to wish that those moments might be lengthened into hours; for back of all the hope was a half dread that the something whispered of by the night breezes, might not be just what one most hoped for after all. They had reached Rose

Cliff, this pair who had been walking silently in the moonlight. As they approached the porch, Doctor Ralph said, "I hear Mrs. Delamere has arrived with her little girl." It seemed as though Nellie's heart ceased beating for the moment, then she said, in as calm a voice as she could command, "Yes, she will make us quite a visit, I hope."

"Nellie, why did you not tell me?"

Ralph raised her face toward his own, and the moonlight shone full upon it now, as he held one hand over each blushing cheek and rosy ear.

She did not speak, but the full lips quivered, and the gray eyes had in them a suspicious sparkle.

"Dear heart, I may speak now, may I not; now that I know there is no barrier?"

Not a word yet passed those quivering lips.

"Why must I plead? Nellie, God knows I love you; knows I have loved you for years. Has not your own heart told you the same long ago?"

He had released the face when the shining tears one by one rolled down on to his hands; and passing his arm about her drew her to him, and raising one throbbing little hand to his lips held it there.

Did she imagine that one hot tear fell upon it? She did not draw it away. She was content, aye, content to rest there in his arms without saying one word or answering one of the pleading questions which he was asking her. Then, loosening his hold on the little hand, he again turned the curly head resting on his shoulder so that he could look into her face. "Nellie, I must have an answer. You lead me to hope. Tell me, darling, will you be my love, my life?" He placed his lips upon hers, and in the responding kiss received his answer. Then both doctor and nurse came back to earth.

"My time must certainly be up, Ralph; and Aunt Eunice will be expecting me on duty."

He took out his watch. "Oh, you have ten minutes more, don't go yet. Matt is resting comfortably, I know, and this happiness has been too long deferred for me to let you go so soon."

The ten minutes passed quickly, and Nellie, with a very rosy face, tore herself from his embrace and went back to her post of duty. By the time she had smoothed out her hair, and donned her uniform, sober, sedate Doctor Ralph was entering the sick room. The patient was doing nicely; fully as well as could be expected.

If the operation which had been performed that day were only successful, how happy it would make Mr. Dean! How Nellie wondered what mystery it was which was wrapped up in that poor dented brain which the doctors had that day tried to help back to its normal condition. Mrs. Dean had been invited over to Mrs. Cooper's for a few days. Hester's quick outspoken manner, with its hearty impulsiveness, had won Mrs. Dean for a friend; and she was perfectly satisfied to go there for a few days, just for a change, she said; and so the operation had been performed at Mr. Dean's, and with Nellie and Aunt Eunice for nurses, and two doctors to regularly attend the case, they hoped for the best.

How Nellie did long to fly home sometimes, to spend the day with Olga and the little Alma; but it was duty first, and an hour now and then was all she could spend at home. Alma was a very forward child and had learned to walk quite early. Scotch oatmeal had helped make a sturdy little body for her, and the air at Primrose Bank precisely agreed with her. Grandma Argyle, as she called herself to the baby, had made Alma a large rag doll with wonderful hair composed of a piece of black astrachan. Its face was of pink surah

silk, while old kid gloves covered the arms and formed hip-leggins, for the wonderful McGinty, which Alma insisted upon calling the baby. Deacon Argyle laughed till he shook off his glasses to see the child cut up her pranks with the doll. She was so old-fashioned, they all said.

Now it happened that Doctor Strong had a dog whose name was Bruno; and, unfortunately, Bruno had a weakness for dolls. More than one child in the village mourned the loss of a doll which Bruno had taken a fancy to, and carried off.

It was a few days after the operation. Nellie was on duty in the sick room at Mr. Dean's; and Aunt Eunice was taking a comfortable nap, in her own room. At Primrose Bank everything was as quiet and restful as possible on this late summer afternoon. Olga was busy with her painting in the little sewing alcove which opened off from the sitting-room where Alma was playing with McGinty. Olga became very much engrossed with her work. She was putting the finishing touches to the portrait on which she was at work when she last saw Clyde. She was living over those unhappy moments as she worked; and her mind was across the ocean. Baby Alma took advantage of the quiet. She walked out onto the

west door-stone and sat there for a time. Then she ventured down to the gate. Old Doctor Strong was on horseback riding leisurely along some distance up the road. Bruno came dashing down the street ahead of him. Alma had deposited McGinty at the base of one of the maple trees that stood just outside the gate at the foot of the primrose slope; and the child was busy picking the blue asters which grew along the edge of the sidewalk. Bruno saw his opportunity, and, seizing the doll, was off down the street and over the meadow with McGinty's red dress showing at every spring he made. Alma travelled after him as fast as her little feet could carry her. Bruno ran through the brook which crossed the road. Would the child take to the bridge, or attempt to cross as the dog had done? The little one saw no danger, and was soon trying to ford the brook; but the water was deep, her little foot slipped, and she fell face down in the pool. The Doctor had not yet turned the bend in the road, for he was so deep in a brown study that he had seen nothing of what was passing; but a rescuer was at hand. Crossing the meadow was a woman, and she saw the little one fall. Her feet seemed to turn to wings, for she was at the brook-

side almost as soon as the child fell. As the doctor came in sight he saw the woman emerge from the brook with the child in her arms. What was his surprise to behold Mrs. Dean. Before he could speak she held up one cautioning finger.

“Sh! It is my little Angie.”

“Whom?” said the doctor in astonishment.

“Why, my little Angie, who was lost long ago.”

The doctor knew she was to be humored, so he said, “Indeed, I am very glad you have found her. How did it happen?”

“I think the dog took her doll and she followed him through the brook. He passed by me dripping, with the doll in his mouth.”

The child was crying now, and calling “Mamma.”

“I am mamma, Angie, don’t you know mamma?”

But the child said, “I want my own mamma at Grandma Argyle’s.”

With a little coaxing, the doctor persuaded Mrs. Dean to walk back to Mrs. Argyle’s, where they had only just missed the child, and were about to search for her. Olga was coming down the path as they reached the gate. She held out her arms to take the child, but the doctor’s quick glance caught her eye.

"Mrs. Dean, this is Mrs. Delamere. Let us go in for a few moments. Perhaps they can let us have some dry garments for the child." Mrs. Dean entered the house, but would not let the little one be taken from her.

"Please excuse me, Mrs. Delamere; but this is my little girl whom I lost some time ago. I have been looking for her for years, and just found her in the brook where she had fallen. My own little Angie."

Mrs. Dean seemed perfectly sane in her actions. She looked from Olga to the doctor, and again to Mrs. Argyle, with such a contented, peaceful expression, that it seemed wicked to dispel the illusion.

"Make Mrs. Dean as comfortable as you can, please. She went into the brook after the baby, and her feet must be soaking wet. I will ride around Mrs. Cooper's way, and get her to stay with Matt while I send Nellie over; and after a little we'll try and get Mrs. Dean home."

As the doctor turned about, his eyes fell on the picture which stood on the easel in the alcove. He started, and looked wonderingly from Olga to Mrs. Argyle.

"Pardon me, but whose work is that?"

"Oh, it is a face which has always impressed me, and I concluded to put it on canvas, and see if I could get rid of it. Is it not a striking face?"

"It certainly is. I had heard you were an artist, and now I believe it. Well, I must hurry on or some one will be very much alarmed," and off he cantered, saying to himself as he rode along, "Can it be possible? yet truth is sometimes stranger than fiction."

He paused at Mrs. Cooper's a moment on the way, and said, "Don't worry about your charge, Mrs. Cooper. She is safe at Mrs. Argyle's."

"Do you mean Mrs. Dean? She is taking a nap."

"Well, not if I am in my right mind, for she just picked Mrs. Delamere's little girl out of the brook as I came along: and I have only a few moments ago left her at the deacon's."

Hester held up both hands and gasped, "For the land sakes!"

Doctor Strong left her wondering and rode on to Mr. Dean's. He hitched his horse at the gate, and walked unbidden into the house. He gave one rap at the study-door and entered the room. Mr. Dean was there. The doctor sat down and

waited a moment in silence. It was not his custom to come in so quietly.

“What is the matter, Doctor?”

“I don’t know whether anything is the matter or not.”

“Why?”

“Your wife thinks she has found her little Angie.”

Mr. Dean started to his feet.

“What do you mean?”

“I mean just this. Mrs. Dean, not half an hour ago, fished Mrs. Delamere’s little girl out of the brook, and insists that the child is hers. She won’t even let the mother take it, and the child after the first fright was over, seems contented to let her cuddle her. There is a picture at Mrs. Argyle’s I want you to see, too. Get your carriage and drive over. Mrs. Cooper, for all I know, is standing at the post-office door, wondering how Mrs. Dean got away without her knowing it.”

“That is very strange; Ethel always looks closely at all the children she meets, but never has taken one in her arms before.”

“Well, I don’t know anything about your trouble, whatever it is that you are trying to get

at the bottom of, but your wife certainly thinks that child is her own; and she looks and acts perfectly sane. It would do your heart good to see her mother the child."

"Who is this Mrs. Delamere?"

"She was Olga Mitchell, the daughter of a minister who was here for several years. She and Nellie Argyle were boon companions."

"Is Nellie Argyle the own child of the deacon and his wife?"

"No, she was adopted some eighteen years ago or more, I should say."

"Where was she gotten?"

"From the Faith Orphan Asylum in N—H—."

"Guess we'd better take Aunt Eunice along with us. She can coax Ethel when no one else can."

Mrs. Dean looked up with a happy smile when her husband entered the room.

"Oh, Rex, I have found Angie and I am so happy. You may give her one kiss, but don't take her from me. I cannot bear it yet."

He stood looking at the child. The great tears rolled down his face, and he did not try to hide them.

“Thank God, the mystery will soon be solved. If I did not realize that years had passed, I too should say, ‘It is my little Angie.’”

“Yes, papa.”

There was a hush like that of death. Mr. Dean looked around the room. “Who spoke? or did I imagine I heard a voice?”

The speaker was revealed in the confused and blushing face of Mrs. Delamere.

“Pardon me, Mr. Dean, but I do not know what impelled me to speak. I could not help it, for your assertion seemed directed to me. I never saw you before, but is not this very much like you.”

Olga brought the portrait within view of all in the room. At that moment some one came along the garden path. It was Nellie, who had cut across through the meadow, and now in through the open window floated the words she was singing,

“Mid pleasures and palaces though I may roam,
Be it ever so humble there's no place like home.”

In another moment she stood in the doorway. What was the meaning of this congregation of people? She looked wonderingly from one to

the other. Then her eyes rested on the portrait, and again sought Mr. Dean's face.

"Whose picture is it, Nellie?"

"Why, Mr. Dean's, of course; only *his* hair is gray, and you have painted it brown."

"We were all thinking there was a striking resemblance."

"Mr. Dean turned to Olga.

"Who was your father?"

"I do not know."

"I understood you were Dr. Mitchell's daughter."

"So did I until I was married; and then they told me that in 18— they adopted me from the Faith Orphan Asylum in N—H—."

Deacon Argyle stepped to the secretary and opened a small drawer. He drew therefrom an old red wallet, and, unrolling it, took out a piece of yellow paper and handed it to Mr. Dean. His hands shook as though with the palsy.

"She has never known it, Mr. Dean; but I shall have to make a clean breast of it now. If you've lost one daughter I guess you've lost two; for our Nellie is own sister to Olga accordin' to this."

Through eager eyes Mr. Dean read the adoption

paper, and in it was the statement that the older of the two children who had been found on the asylum steps on such a day, had been adopted by Robert A. Mitchell, but he wished the girls never to know they were related ; and that was Deacon Argyle's secret, guarded even from his wife.

“ We are sisters, then, as Marie said ; ” the girls spoke in one breath.

Mrs. Argyle had been gone from the room for a moment. She returned with a small parcel, and, unrolling it, laid on the table before them several tiny garments. Aunt Eunice came forward and undertook to examine them, but the tears made her eyeglasses so misty that she could hardly see. She picked up the little shirt and handed it to Nellie.

“ If I made it, there is a small E. D. in white silk on the point under the shoulder button.” Nellie turned the point over and walked around the room showing the letters to every one there.

“ That stands for Evelyn Dean, and you are she.”

Nellie’s breast rose and fell as the great sobs strove for mastery ; and then the two girls, wrapped in each other’s arms, wept out their joy.

“ Now we have two mothers and two fathers,

are we not rich?" And they both bent over Mrs. Dean, kissing now her happy face, and again that of little Alma.

"You shall be Angie after this, my darling," said Olga; "for you are the angel who brought us our own mother and father."

"Then Nellie went back to Mrs. Argyle.

"I shall not love you any less, mother."

"Oh, but you will be leaving us."

Then, blushing and whispering, Nellie said, "I should have to leave you soon anyway, for Ralph wants me so much;" and Mrs. Argyle's kiss was a benediction itself, then her answer, "I am more than satisfied."

But time waits for no one, and the night was drawing on. Mrs. Dean would stay with the baby and Olga; while Nellie went back to her post, not only as nurse, but as daughter of the house. Heaven had been more kind to her after all. As the days passed Matt grew stronger, and one day was able to walk down to the study to see Mr. Dean.

"I have come to tell you I can remember about those children now. I took them to the Faith Orphan Asylum in N—— H—— on the —th of April, 18—."

" You are right, Matt, and the children are all right, too. Katie is as happy as a lark ; and Doctor Strong is going to see if he can do as much for Katie's feet as he has for your brain. Now, don't worry yourself at all about anything, but try and get well as fast as you can."

And Mr. Dean would not let him talk about it at all. He did send to the hospital for another nurse, for he insisted that Nellie was all tired out and needed rest ; though she assured him she was not at all tired, but the doctor seconded Mr. Dean's motion, and she had to obey.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ALL THINGS COMES TO HIM WHO PATIENT WAITS.

“But the speed was high, and the danger nigh;
And Death was waiting to build his pyre.”

ONALD, if you do not bring the baby to me to-day I shall undertake to go and get her myself. Understand, I shall put up with this nonsense no longer. It will do me good to see her, I know. I am consumed with ennui, and must have some diversion.” The speaker leaned back in his easy chair and puffed away at a cigar. One leg was still bandaged with splints, and it was a vain threat that he would go down the rocky road to Donald’s cottage after the child.

“Aweel, my laird, you cannot see the bairn.”

“Cannot see the child? Upon my word that is cool!”

“I speak the truth, my lord.”

Sir Albany sat as near bolt upright as he could. “What do you mean, man? You have kept putting off bringing Alma to me because the doctor said I must not be disturbed or worried in the least, and now you have the audacity to tell me to my face that I cannot see the child; Ha! but that is too much.”

“I may as weel tell it ye, Sir Albany. The mither cam’ an’ took awa’ the bairn while ye were nearer dead than alive.”

“Took the child! Away, do you mean?”

“Aye, sir, took it away to America. There, I’ve gone and made a fool of myself, tellin’ ye;” and Donald reached Sir Albany in time to keep him from falling from his chair. He had tried to arise and had sunken in a faint, whether from alarm or pain, Donald did not know.

After a time Clyde regained consciousness, and his rage was unbounded when he learned the child was in reality gone beyond his call.

“Well, you have played a pretty trick on me; I wouldn’t have had it happen for every paltry dollar in this old rookery. Taken my child, and gone to America! By Heaven, but I’ll have her yet!”

"Your wife cam' to see you while you were ill."

"She did? And why did she not see me?"

"I dinna ken. She was in this house, aye, in the next room, and I think she heard you say you didn't want to see her; so she went away."

"She was quite right to do so; but she had no business to take the child."

"Tut, tut, sir! it was as muckle her bairn as yours."

"I say she had no right to take it, and have it I will or die in the attempt."

The old dragon-blood was again thoroughly aroused, and this was the man who could be angelic at times, but when anything crossed his path the angel's wings changed into dragon's talons. He was moved by impulses, now as ever, even as we have seen him, over and over again, serving the first command of the sovereign Self, who alone reigned supreme in his nature.

When he rode in a gondola over the shimmering waves of the Venetian lagoons; when he thought of her whom he had taken to love and to cherish until death should part them; then the angel sleeper awakened, bade him hasten back to right the wrong he had done to that

trusting wife ; but when again, on his return, he found her gone, then the angel folded its wings, and the dark Dragon of Armadale spread its pinions over him, and ruled the creature tossed by the passions of love and hate,—those two eternal foes. His very restlessness kept him an invalid longer than he would otherwise have been ; but time, the healer, still performed his duty, and once again Sir Albany rode down the mountain-side, and away from the castle of Armadale. As he passed under the portcullis he said to Donald, “ I shall come back with my baby Alma, depend upon it, man ; or else you will never again have to draw the bridge for Sir Albany, Baron of Armadale.”

Then, like the wind, he rode down the steep pathway. Old Donald turned back to his good wife Jean who stood in the shadow behind him and said, “ Aweel, lass, if he goes at that pace from here to America, we have in truth seen the last of him ; ” and she answered as she bent her head and clasped her hands,

“ An’ the Lord will it, may he never take the bairn fra its mither ! ”

And Donald answered, “ Amen ! ”

It was but a few days after when a message

came to Primrose Bank. Olga received it, and when she read it both she and the cablegram fell to the floor. Mrs. Argyle heard the sound and came running to learn the cause. The yellow paper told the story, "Sir Albany is on his way to take the child. Donald MacDuff."

Then Mrs. Argyle's common sense stood her in good stead. She dispatched a messenger for Leon Thorpe, and, when he came, she showed him the cablegram.

"Can you think of what ought to be done?"

"He is on his way here."

"Yes!"

Leon looked at his watch. "The last train leaves at 6:52 and it is after five now. I shall have time to consult with no one. I can do nothing but shadow him and see that he does not abduct the child. Keep close watch of the baby, and for Heaven's sake impart your courage to Olga."

They clasped hands. "I wish you God-speed;" and the 6:52 carried Leon Thorpe on his mission.

It was he who stood on the dock as the great steamships were unburdened of their human freight. Should he know Clyde Delamere after

this lapse of years? And who should question whether that face were not indelibly stamped on his mind; the face of the man who had blighted his life. Leon Thorpe missed not a steamer. Patiently he stood until the last wave of the sea of upturned faces had surged over the docks. There were no other steamers due for two days, and still the object of his search had not been discovered. He might take a run home, and see how Olga was. Dear heart, what a pity she should be so troubled! It was a wild night, this one on which Leon Thorpe turned his steps homeward. He could not have stayed in the city for any possible reason. He was seized with a wild and burning desire to go home, to go to Mrs. Argyle's and assure himself that Olga and Alma were safe and well. So he went. How the storm beat, and how the wind howled and shrieked, as the train sped over the almost submerged tracks; then again out over slippery trestles, where it seemed that the storm-fiend would wrench the heavy train from the track; rattling, shrieking, moaning,—oh, what sounds went through the ears of the passengers, as though all the fiends of the air were engaged in their wild orgies.

Still on sped the train. Whether the wires

were down nobody knew, only this. Leon stepped to the door to see if he could tell about where they were, for the time seemed interminable since they had made a stop at a station. As he stood on the platform, and through the inky blackness saw the distant gleaming of city lights, he felt a lurch, quick as thought looked back into the car and—Merciful Heavens! it was being telescoped by the tender. Then Leon knew no more.

One morning when he awoke, it was to find himself being tenderly watched over by a uniformed nurse. He had to stop and think things over a little, but the last thing he remembered was seeing the tender crashing through the car directly toward him. He attempted to raise his right arm to hide the sight. It was not there to raise. Then he said to the nurse, "Did I lose it in the accident?"

"Yes!"

"Am I hurt very much otherwise?"

"I think not."

"Oh, but I should have been home to-day!
Poor little Olga."

"Were you in company with some one?"

"No!"

"Have you friends you would like to have know you are here?"

"Does no one know, then?"

"You have been here nearly a week. There was nothing on your clothing to tell your name or address."

"I don't know whether it is best to tell them or not."

"You are getting along very nicely now. Suppose you give me your name, and then it will be time for the medicine again."

Leon did so, and was soon sleeping under the influence of the narcotic. A nurse came walking down the aisle between the beds.

"Nellie Argyle!"

"Yes, I am back on duty to-day, and am sent to relieve you."

"Here is a poor fellow who has just reg^o consciousness enough to give his name. I^o a victim of the wreck. He comes from the same place you do,—Westbridge, and his name is Leon Thorpe."

Nellie caught at the iron foot-rail of the bed.

"Why, I thought he was in the city. No one at home knows it."

"For the very reason the man was among

the seriously injured, and has just been allowed to come out from under the influence. He has lost an arm."

"Poor Leon!" And Nellie took her place beside the sleeper.

She studied the record, and looked to see that everything was as it should be. Then she made the round of the ward in charge. One sleeper was much injured. The record showed a very high temperature, and the head was bandaged, while a bag of ice lay over the feverish brain.

"This poor fellow," said the nurse who was just leaving Nellie in charge, "I haven't much hopes of. He was hurt internally. His fever runs quite high, you see. We don't know what to do about him."

"What is his name?"

"Nobody knows anything about him only that he had a very odd ring on his finger."

Such a lump rose in Nellie's throat she could not speak for an instant. Then she choked it back. "Where is it, the ring, I mean?"

"At the office."

"Will you stay here a moment, please?"

And, without waiting for an answer, Nellie was off in a second. She returned in a very

short space of time. "I could hardly believe my eyes, but I know now it is true. This is Sir Albany, Baron of Armadale. His wife is visiting at our house, and he was coming there this month."

"Isn't it strange you should find two here whom you know?"

"Yes, I described the ring exactly, and there isn't a doubt but that this is my friend."

"He speaks of Olga in his delirium, but seems to think he has some one near him by the name of Alma, but he cannot quite reach her."

"Alma is his little girl; and Olga is his wife. They have telegraphed for her already."

"If she don't come soon, she won't find him alive. He has been like this ever since he came."

Then Nellie was left with her patients.

How much stranger than fiction is real life! Here before her lay the man to whom she had once plighted her troth; yet not one fibre of her being vibrated to the word love. How she pitied him, no one could know; she would have done anything to make his suffering less; anything to bring him back to health and happiness; for she

felt but that for misunderstandings he and Olga should have been happy now ; but had it not been for those same misunderstandings she herself might not yet have known the joys of kinship ; might not yet have found that sister whom she had known in spirit but not in name.

Ah, well ! messages are transported by lightning, and people travel by steam ; so it did not take many hours for Olga to be on her way, and she would take the baby with her ; for, if Clyde was dying, it was no more than right that he should see the child. What misgivings, and ifs, and might-be's crowded into her already worried brain, none but God knew ; and when she reached the hospital and looked upon those unconscious features, she would have given her own life if it could have been the means of saving the father of her child. There, by that sick bed, she forgot all the unkindness, all the hasty words, forgot even that this very journey was to rob her of the little Alma ; and kneeling by that bedside, she prayed that if the Lord saw fit to save him, he might take her, or even the little Alma if only Clyde might be spared. And as she knelt there his dark eyes opened with the light of consciousness in them, and Olga's tears rained fast

upon the cold hand. He looked at Nellie who stood beside him in her nurse's garb. Then his eyes wandered to Olga still kneeling, and then to the little Alma, who was held in the other nurse's arms.

“Let him kiss the baby good-bye and then take her away.”

When she was gone he turned his gaze upon Nellie. His lips moved but no sound came. She bent her head to listen. He was whispering, “Forgive me if I spoiled your life. I was not good enough for you.”

“I forgave you long ago, for a greater happiness came to me.”

“I am glad for that. Tell Olga,” she stepped aside and Olga's ear was bent low to catch the whisper, “I was wrong; I have my punishment.”

“Don't, Clyde, you break my heart; I would die for you if I could. I will give my life's blood for you now if it will save you.”

“No, Olga, it is too late, too late! It grows misty, I cannot see you. Leon Thorpe loves you. Let him care for you. He will be more kind to you than I have been, for I was cursed —cursed by the Dragon of Armadale!”

We draw the curtain over the struggle. None who heard it, will ever forget the wail of anguish that rang through the room, as the whisper rose to a wild despairing cry. It roused the other sleeper, and Nellie led Olga away from the scene of trial ; past the white beds of the ward till she came to Leon's couch.

“ Clyde gave you to Leon. See, he lives ! ”

And the sleeper awakened, rested his eyes on Olga, and dreamed again.

Olga was under the doctor's care then for a time. Her nerves had been at such a high tension they gave out entirely, but she was where she received the best of care ; and when Leon Thorpe was well enough to go home, Nellie went too with Olga.

Life passed very uneventfully at Westbridge for nearly a year. Ralph was getting quite impatient, and the day for the wedding was finally set.

An evening came in early September, when Ralph and Nellie went to the church to practice, previous to the ceremony. Olga sat at the organ playing softly the wedding march. Ralph stood by the chancel rail, while Nellie, leaning on Leon's arm, walked slowly up the aisle. She looked up

into his face and playfully said, "I'll play you are my father just for to-night, but I have two fathers, and what I most need is a brother."

And after that she wondered what made him tremble so. The practicing was over, and Ralph and Nellie, oblivious to all others, walked down the old church aisle arm in arm. A ray of sunlight stole in through the western window and made a halo round her head.

Olga had finished the wedding march, but her fingers still clung to the keys. Then sweeping over them softly and full of pathetic melody, came the opening bars of *Home, Sweet Home!* She sang and played the air through. What melody filled the solemn old church as the slanting sunbeams glinted over the polished pews. She thought she was alone, and she sang as never before, clear through to the last line of that soul-thrilling home song. Out from behind the curtain which hid the player from his view came Leon Thorpe, his empty sleeve fastened into his coat-pocket. Seating himself beside her, he took her hands from the keys, and imprisoned both in his only one.

"Olga, I have waited for you all my life.

Will you make for me a home such as you have been singing about?"

"I will gladly help you make the home, Leon; but I can give you more than friendship. I thought my love was buried."

"I shall be satisfied."

THE END.

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